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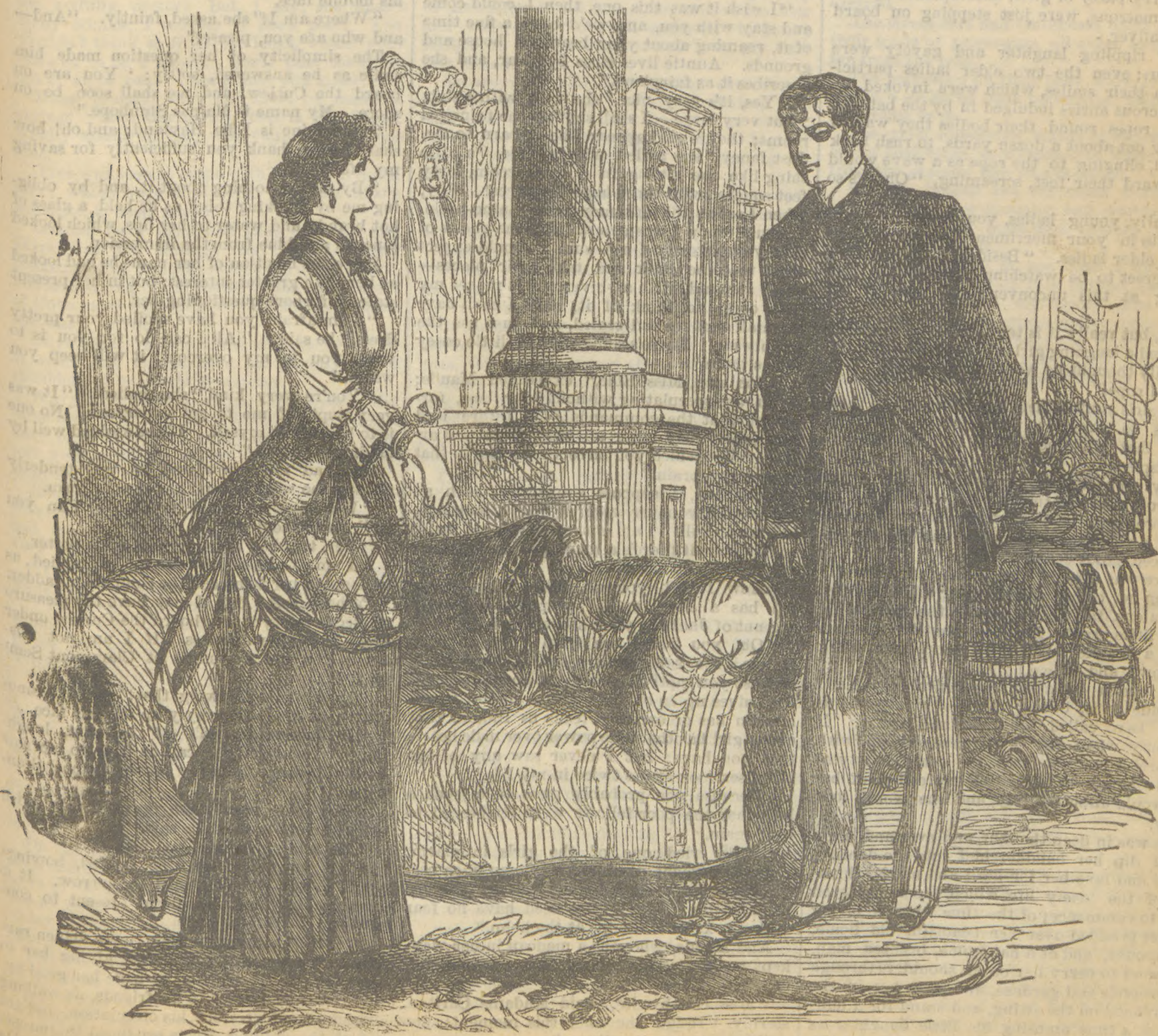
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THE BEAUTIFUL DEMON; OR, MORE BITTER THAN DEATH.

BY FRANCES HELEN DAVENPORT,

AUTHOR OF "AN AMBITIOUS GIRL," ETC., ETC.



"TAKE BACK YOUR RING AND PLEDGE, YOU PROMISED MORE THAN YOU COULD PERFORM."

The Beautiful Demon;

OR,

MORE BITTER THAN DEATH.

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CHAPTER I.

A BRIGHT SCENE.

It was a glorious afternoon in the sweet month of June, and the sun was pouring down upon the numerous pleasure-seekers who were assembled on the pier and beach at Long Branch.

Every hue of sunshade was brought into requisition, and at a distance gave one the impression of a field of colored mushrooms agitated by a breeze.

The sea was alive with smartly-trimmed yachts, and the pier literally crowded with elegantly-dressed matrons and pretty girls.

The bewitching strains of a brass band, stationed outside the Ocean House, playing the "Blue Danube," could be heard in the distance.

The bathers were out in full force, and the hackmen were plying a brisk trade, as not one could be seen on the ranks. Charming equestrians were cantering their well-bred horses, bestowing a smile of recognition here and there; in fact, all was sunshine and gladness.

A merry party of girls, accompanied by two elderly matrons, were just stepping on board the Highflyer.

Their rippling laughter and gayety were infectious; even the two elder ladies participated in their smiles, which were invoked by the ludicrous antics indulged in by the bathers, as with ropes round their bodies they walked gingerly out about a dozen yards, to rush back terrified, clinging to the rope as a wave would roll toward their feet, screaming, "Oh, it's so cold!"

"Really, young ladies, you must be more moderate in your merriment!" exclaimed one of the elder ladies. "Besides, it is anything but discreet to be watching those stupid men bathing at this unconventional time of the day."

"Oh, but really it is too ridiculous, madam!" answered a laughing girl of seventeen summers. "I really thought he would faint as he clung to that old rope!"

The girls stuffed their handkerchiefs in their mouths to suppress the smothered scream, seeing that Madame Carlton was beginning to look displeased.

They were quickly seated, and taking the oars from the boatman, he pushed them off the shore, and they, in true masterly fashion, rowed away, feathering their oars as only experienced hands could.

There was one girl among the party who did not join her companions in their mirth, and sat quite alone, taking no part in the navigating of the little craft. She was about the medium height, a fragile form, dark complexion, black eyebrows, and brown hair.

She had a beautiful expressive mouth and soft blue eyes; but at the first glance no one could have called Effie Hayland pretty. It was only when her eyes were lit up with pleasurable emotion that she could be styled good-looking; and then the expression of her face would alter entirely, and she would look lovely.

She was in deep thought, and ever and anon would dip her handkerchief into the dancing waves and lave her forehead and hands, thinking of the lonely life which she would soon have to commence; of the time when a loving mother presided over her beautiful old home, Rosemount, and of a handsome, bronzed man, who used to carry her on his shoulders through the grounds and gardens, and place her in the old orchard on the swing, and stand for a half-hour at a time amusing his little daughter as she would cry out, "Higher—higher still, papa!"

All these thoughts rushed through her brain as the girls laughed, chatted, and sung, keeping time to the measure of their oars.

"A penny for your thoughts, Effie," said a lovely, majestic girl, who had given up the tiller to one of her companions as she saw the shade of sorrow upon her favorite school-companion's face.

"Oh, dearest Maude, I was thinking of the dear old home, and of long ago, and of the loneliness I shall feel when I return there to find no welcome smile from a dear mother—no father's cheery voice to greet me!" And a tear rolled down her cheek as she conjured up the cold prospect and future.

"This is no day for tears, Effie," said Maude Garthwaite, placing her arm affectionately round her friend's waist. "You know I can sympathize with you, for I am an orphan, too, as you know, and that is the bond which has existed between us ever since we met; but I mean to be jolly, and so must you, for it is very delightful now on the water, and you know this is my last week, and you'll have a new girl to share your room. I hope she'll be nice."

"I devoutly hope she will," replied Effie. "You cannot expect I can feel very merry at the thought of losing you, the only friend I have, dear Maude. I am not at all partial to fresh faces, as you know, for you are the only friend I've made at school in three years. There's one comfort, if I don't like her, it's not for long, as my time is up, next term."

"I wish it was this one, then I could come and stay with you, and we'd have a fine time of it, roaming about your beautiful house and grounds. Auntie lives close by, dear, and she describes it as fairyland."

"Yes, it's very nice," she said, with a sigh, "but very large. I shall shut up the principal rooms; they would appear like a barn to me. Just fancy," she added, with a smile, "a little thing like me sitting in a large room, forty feet square, with three huge fireplaces! Why, when I sat at the enormous long dining-table, I should fancy I was entertaining the ghosts of all my ancestors. I am sure I should expect them to come back and take their places—ugh!" she said, with a shiver. "It makes my flesh creep to think of it; only I shall have them all shut up and sealed, and just use the south wing. There's some darling little cosey rooms there."

"But stop, Miss Effie," exclaimed Maude; "you are speculating without your host, forgetting that the commands of a future lord and master may alter all these delightful arrangements which you have concocted in that little active brain."

"Husband, I suppose you mean; such an improbability never entered my calculation, and never will. I am cut out for an old maid, and I doubt if there's a man upon earth that I am likely to attract."

"How foolish you do talk! Why, every Jill has a Jack; and I prophesy a goodly amount of Jacks to your share, my lady."

"Oh, you judge me from yourself, Miss Maude," she said, with a smile, "and think because you captivate, from the boy that cleans the knives up to our new grand signor, whom madam has procured to teach us Italian, that every girl has the same power over male hearts that you have; but I never saw any of the other sex look at me twice in my life."

"Because you probably gave them such a look that the poor fellows were frightened to look again."

"Oh!" cried one of the girls in alarm, "there's a yacht coming right down upon us."

"Nonsense!" laughed Maude, as she took her place at the tiller; "you need have no fear with a coxswain like me at the helm."

And Maude, who was a madcap in her way, kept on a straight course, just to tease her companions.

"Miss Garthwaite," said Madame Carlton, sternly, "resign the tiller this moment; you will bring about a collision."

"Oh, bother!" muttered Maude, as she got

up in disgust, and carelessly permitting the ropes to become entangled around her feet.

Loud screams and much confusion ensued, although there was really no danger, as a good lookout was kept on board the yacht, whose course was altered immediately.

CHAPTER II.

A FATEFUL MEETING.

EFFIE HAYLAND, naturally of a nervous temperament, was standing up in the boat, when some one pulled sharp at the tiller and caused the frail craft to swerve quickly to the right.

Effie lost her balance and fell overboard. The accident was perceived from the yacht, and, without a moment's hesitation, a gentleman leaped into the sea, and cleaving the water with strong, practiced strokes, caught the young girl as she was rising to the surface for the third and last time.

The occupants of the boat were silent with horror at the scene which was happening under their very eyes.

But few of them would ever forget the expression of the drowning girl's face as it turned toward them in mute appeal.

Miss Hayland and her preserver were taken on board the Curlew, which bore up for the shore, leaving the boat to follow.

Under skilled treatment Effie was restored to consciousness, to find a handsome man bending over her with a look of great concern on his mobile face.

"Where am I?" she asked, faintly. "And—who are you, please?"

The simplicity of her question made him smile as he answered, softly: "You are on board the Curlew, and we shall soon be on shore. My name is Malpas Stanhope."

"And mine is Effie Hayland; and oh! how shall I ever thank you sufficiently for saving my life?"

"By saying nothing about it, and by obliging me by drinking this," as he held a glass of hot brandy and water to her lips, which looked pinched and blue from the immersion.

Since the mention of her name he had looked at her with greater interest; but in her present state he forbore questioning her.

"I am afraid you have spoiled your pretty dress," he said. "All I can do for you is to wrap you in my overcoat; it will keep you warm."

"You're very kind," she replied. "It was very stupid of me to get so nervous. No one is to blame but myself. I'll be scolded well by Madame Carlton."

She had risen now, and he was tenderly placing the wrap around her slender form.

"We have arrived," he said. "Can you walk on to the deck?"

"Yes, thanks; I feel ever so much better."

"I am so pleased to hear it," he replied, as he assisted her to ascend the companion-ladder. "Perhaps some day I may have the pleasure of receiving you on board the Curlew under more favorable auspices. If I am not mistaken, you are a student at Claremont Seminary?"

"Fancy you knowing that!" she said innocently, as she looked shyly up into his face.

"It is strange, isn't it?" he said, laughing. "I was going to call on you to-morrow with a message from my father, Colonel Stanhope."

Effie's blue eyes were opened wide with astonishment now as she said:

"He is my guardian, and you—"

"His unworthy son," he replied, bowing; "but I will tell you more to-morrow. It is both my duty and pleasure at present to convey you speedily home."

Procuring a carriage they were driven rapidly to the seminary; and after giving her to the care of the matron, he bade her good-by, and returned on foot to his friends, as walking exercise would restore his circulation, and get rid of the chilling effects produced by immersion and wet clothes. Before reaching the pier

he met Madame Carlton and the bevy of young ladies.

"That's the gentleman," said Maude in a whisper, "that saved Effie."

"Pardon me, sir," said Madame, addressing him with one of her sweetest smiles, while her scholars fastened admiring looks on him, which rather abashed him; "I owe you a thousand thanks!"

"You have the advantage of me then." Suddenly recollecting recent events, he added, "The young lady to whom it was my good fortune to be of service is safely at home. With your kind permission, I will call tomorrow to inquire after her health."

Raising his cap he went on his way, glad to escape from such a battery of bright eyes.

"Isn't he handsome?" said Maude to a companion. "Do you know" (this in a confidential whisper), "I believe he'll fall in love with dear Effie. I am sure he's a lord, or a baron, or something of the kind, traveling *incog*. I don't mind the scolding I got, considering all things."

Another delicious bit of excitement was in store for the girls when they got back to the seminary, in the shape of a back, from which a lovely girl alighted and looked inquiringly at Madame.

"I am Olive Stahl," she said, in a low, sweet voice, and swift, intelligent glances at her future school-companions.

"It's the new girl," whispered Maude. "Isn't she awfully pretty? But, I say, she hasn't many trunks; I wonder if she's poor. You wouldn't think so from her looks, would you? She's fit to be a queen. She'll take the shine out of all of you. I am going, you know."

These remarks were cut short by Madame saying: "Miss Garthwaite, this is Miss Stahl. Kindly attend to her, will you? Effie is not able."

Olive was soon at home with her new friends, all of whom were anxious to show her every attention in their power.

Lessons were discarded that evening, and Olive was put through her paces in being coaxed to sing and play, which she did divinely, and in speaking of the countries she had visited, of Cuba more especially, of which sunny clime she was a native.

Olive Stahl was a tall and elegant brunette. A small and classic head sat proudly above shoulders of exquisite symmetry.

Wavy hair, black as night; large eyes of the same hue, with long black fringes, which could dart forth flashes of angry hate or woo with soft glances, lit up a face that was radiantly beautiful.

Effie was simply charmed with her, and, instead of acting the role of protectress as she had intended, found herself hanging on her very words and anticipating her every wish.

"I do so love you, Olive!" she said. "Shall we always be friends? I am so lonely!"

"Yes, dear; why should we not?" was the winning reply, as this girl from southern climes bent her classic head to kiss the meek-spirited Effie.

"I could share everything with you, Olive."

"Everything?" was the arch reply; "not the love of another, surely?"

"No one connected with me shall ever tempt you," said Effie, lightly.

"And if they did," was the proud reply, as the speaker's dark eyes flashed, "I should not deign to share that which I could not possess wholly."

On the morrow, Malpas Stanhope called and informed Effie that her stay in the school would have to be shortened, as her guardian wished her to go down to Rosemount, he having need of her presence in connection with urgent legal affairs.

"It was arranged that he should call for her on his return from the yachting expedition, which would be in a couple of weeks."

Thus it came about that Effie was parted from her new friend almost as soon as they had met.

CHAPTER III.

A PRESENTIMENT.

It was bright midsummer weather, and the grand old-fashioned garden at Rosemount was all aglow with roses. The house was half-hidden beneath a luxuriance of foliage and flowers. A great magnolia on one side climbing up to the dormer windows; on the other, pale monthly roses and odorous golden and crimson-tinted honeysuckle.

This was the home of Miss Hayland, which was situated in the romantic and picturesque region of Otsego Lake.

Effie was in raptures with the dear old place and on that glorious day, as she looked earnestly into the eyes of Malpas Stanhope, she appeared even pretty.

He was holding her hands tightly within his own as he gazed into those truthful eyes, and said:

"Dear Effie, I love you; will you be my wife?"

She felt as though an arrow, tipped with life, not death, had been sped through her heart.

"Say, dearest, will you be mine?"

"I will," she murmured.

"Will you trust me—a gentle creature that in my strength I could crush?"

"Trust you?" she replied; "I feel I shall find protection in your strong arm."

"God bless you, Effie!" he said, as he pressed his lips to her pure white brow, and twined his arm around her waist. Drawing her close up to the shelter of his breast, he stroked her hair and whispered, "I shall endeavor to prove faithful to your great trust and love, my darling little bride!"

An atmosphere of holy beauty surrounded her and pervaded her whole soul. A deep joy, that overflowed in tears as well as smiles, filled her heart, warming it into a higher, deeper, purer consciousness of life and its responsibilities.

In two months' time there was a quiet wedding at Rosemount, and Effie Hayland changed her name for Mrs. Stanhope.

Among the number of congratulatory letters from her school-friends, was one from Olive, expressing her delight at the great change in her friend's state, and another from her guardian, inclosing an exquisite miniature of her mother set round with diamonds. Of all the gifts, this one she prized above any.

Effie's one great disappointment on her wedding-day was the absence of her school-friend Olive, who had just obtained a lucrative appointment as governess in the family of a wealthy widow.

Twelve months have passed since Effie became Mrs. Stanhope—a year of blissful happiness and joy, and the young wife is crowned by maternity.

It was a lovely day; the crimson flush of the rising sun could be seen above the distant blue hills as Mrs. Stanhope clasped to her arms her little daughter.

"Oh, bright vision! unparalleled blessing!" she exclaimed, as she turned her eyes from the view of the glorious morning landscape to the contemplation of her baby's sweet face. "When I forget thee, my darling, may all I love cease to love me!"

At that moment Maude Garthwaite entered, exclaiming:

"Why, dear Mrs. Stanhope, what brings the tears in those pretty eyes? I shall scold you well, and so shall Mr. Stanhope, if I see you crying over our little darling."

"Oh, Maude, dear," she replied, "they were tears of joy. I was looking deep into the violet eyes of my treasure, and trying to see if I could read its future."

"Come, dear Effie, let us think of the present. And so you have decided, I hear, that Olive is to be the name of your darling? I think you might have stretched a point and added mine. Effie Maude would sound very pretty," she said, saucily.

"Who said it was to be Olive Effie?" she asked, with a rising color.

"Your husband."

"He is mistaken, dear Maude; it is to be pure and simple Olive."

"I'm quite jealous of her," the beautiful girl said, with a pout.

"You need not be—I love you very dearly; but Olive came like a bright kindred spirit upon my life when all seemed dark and cheerless, and when you, in your beauty, seemed too exalted to stoop to the friendship of such an ordinary mortal as myself."

The *tete-a-tete* was interrupted by the entrance of her husband.

He caught her to his manly breast, pressing kisses on her hands, lips, and brow.

She tremblingly placed the baby in its father's arms.

He held it in silence a moment, and murmured his thanks for the restoration of his wife, and the unspeakable blessing of his child.

As he replaced it tenderly in the arms of its mother he said, softly:

"I shall love it better than anything upon earth except you, my sweet wife."

Olive Stahl was sitting in her sanctum one rainy afternoon; the rain was driving in sheets against the window-panes.

It was one of those miserable days when everything puts on a darker aspect; but a smile of satisfaction lighted up the face of Olive as she perused a letter which had just arrived.

The street-cars and omnibuses toiled by with their loads of passengers, all eager to get shelter from the rain.

The policemen on their beat were trying to obtain a sheltered nook under the awnings or projecting eaves.

The grim equestrian statue of Worth stood out in bold relief, as a cascade of water poured from the pedestal like an avalanche.

But she heeded not the outer world or its surroundings; her thoughts had wandered far from the city, its noise and tumult, to quiet, peaceful Rosemount.

"Thank Heaven, in less than a week from this I shall be quit of this galling badge of servitude! And so, my dainty Miss Adela, you gave your governess notice because she was too fascinating for your noble brother! But I repay scorn for scorn!" she exclaimed, with flashing eyes. "How dare she term me a designing woman?"

And she ground her teeth maliciously as she finished reading the epistle, which ran thus:

"MY DEAREST OLIVE:—I am so happy to hear that you are at last coming to Rosemount. I cannot express to you how welcome you will be. My dear husband is longing to see my pet school-fellow, and is almost in love with you before he has even made your acquaintance."

"My little Olive is growing such a beauty, and I am sure you will love your little namesake."

"Maude is frequently here, but it is not always for the sake of Mrs. Stanhope; there's a certain gentleman, an old friend of Malpas's, by name Cyril Gordon; I'll leave you to guess the rest."

"Next Tuesday my husband will come to town to bring you back. I should have joined him, but I am still very weak. Now, do not keep him waiting, for he is very particular upon the score of punctuality."

"Reserving all further news till we meet, believe me,

Your fond and affectionate friend,

"EFFIE STANHOPE."

"I wonder whether I shall like this man?" she ejaculated. "How strange that plain, quiet-looking little Effie should have attracted this paragon of manly virtues! Ah! it only shows what wealth can do. I wonder if he's as handsome as they say? Well, a few short days will unravel the truth."

"What's this peculiar sensation that courses through my veins when I think of this man? It seems to thrill me with a numbness—a pain. Is this some presentiment of coming evil?"

"Oh, this is folly, brought on by this lonely life, pent-up and caged like some imprisoned bird. I am getting morbid, and hunger for my freedom; but I must be brave," she exclaimed, as she sat down to her writing table and hastily penned an acceptance of Mrs. Stanhope's welcome.

CHAPTER IV.

A LOVING HOSTESS.

OLIVE STAHL was standing before her mirror, and presented a perfect picture of radiant beauty and matchless dignity, as she put the last touches to her handsome traveling toilet.

"Now," she thought, "I must subjugate this husband of Effie's—this shining light of manhood, as she styles him. I must give him the scathing rays of my sunny eyes. If he can behold them unmoved, then he is the stone they give him credit for."

Her soliloquy was interrupted by a servant, who informed her that Mr. Stanhope had arrived.

When Olive entered the room, all that Malpas could see was a pair of large, dark, dreamy eyes, looking pleadingly up into his face as if beseeching for care and tenderness—a form of exquisite beauty—a voice of sweetest melody, which intoxicated his senses, and steeped him in a dream of delirium, entrancing his whole soul, and holding him spellbound.

During their journey he was blind and deaf to all but the thrilling voice of the beautiful siren.

The gaze of her dreamy eyes had penetrated the depths of his very soul; and as the train rushed madly through the darkness, he fell into a most dangerous reverie, until conscience whispered:

"You are thinking too much of this beautiful stranger. This is wrong, and very dangerous. Turn your thoughts away from the subject."

Upon which Malpas Stanhope ventured to argue with conscience, thinking:

"Why should I not be kind to an orphan girl? Can there be more sin in admiring one of nature's beautiful creations than one of man's?—a daub of a picture, or a statue?"

And so he fought with conscience.

In the mean time, Effie was lovingly preparing to receive her husband and her friend.

She had selected a beautiful suite of rooms in the south wing of the mansion, where the windows overlooked a delightful flower-garden. From the boudoir there was a magnificent view of the distant hills, beyond which stretched a wide expanse of the lake.

She fidgeted about this chamber in a state of delighted excitement, looping up a delicate lace-curtain, adjusting the satin drapery with artistic skill and fairy-like touches, filling rare, old-fashioned bowls with sweet mignonette and glorious roses of every hue and culture.

A beautiful flush was upon her soft cheeks, a tender light shone in her gentle eyes, as she stood contemplating the beautiful bed, with its snow-white curtains looped up with blue silken bands, a veritable bower for beauty's repose.

"Fanchette," she called, "bring me that blue satin eider-down quilt—the nights are rather chilly, and Miss Stahl is not used to the country; and bring me that dressing-case which came this morning."

And Fanchette obeyed her mistress, and placed before her a magnificent dressing-case of ebony, richly inlaid with gold, and lined with white silk-velvet, with every necessary adjunct of a lady's toilet.

"Set it down there, Fanchette, by the window, and bring that work-stand. Yes," she said, admiringly, "we will place it in this little nook, and she can sit and work and look out upon the hills and the mountains, and see the natty yachts sailing along upon our beautiful lake. Yes, this is a delightful seat; but to be perfect, she must have my little sewing chair and ottoman. Go, Fanchette, if you are not tired of running, and bring them."

Fanchette returned once more, bearing a little low, luxuriously-cushioned chair, with foot-cushion to match.

"Now I think it is perfect," she said, delightedly. "Look around, Fanchette, and tell me if there is anything wanting that you can suggest."

"No, madam," was the reply; "all is complete."

"Now I must go and see if they are setting the table right in the dining-room, while you run into the nursery and attend to baby."

The sun was setting, and his last rays came glimmering through the open windows; the fragrance of flowers perfumed the room; a soft light from numerous wax candles shed their luster upon the glittering tea-table.

It was a scene of elegance and comfort, of brightness and fragrance, and no wonder that Effie smiled with satisfaction as she entered it.

In a few minutes after that she stood on the broad flight of steps, a fragile, graceful little figure, in soft shaded gray robes, with little Olive in her arms; a flush upon her cheeks, a light in her eyes, making her pretty for the moment, as she placed her hand in that of her husband and kissed him affectionately, while he returned it in a cool and formal manner.

Olive caught her in a fervent embrace.

Effie's heart was full of love and happiness, almost too much for words.

"Come, come, my dear," observed her husband, "you forget that Miss Stahl is very tired."

"Yes, yes," she replied, with a blush; "I was lost for the moment even to the laws of hospitality; but I feel sure that Olive will pardon me." And so saying, Effie conducted her friend to her chamber.

"Now sit still and rest, love; let me wait on you;" and she removed the handsome plumed hat and traveling-cloak with her own delicate fingers, and imprinting a warm kiss upon her glowing cheek, exclaimed: "Oh, I am so happy to have you here, my dear Olive—my own lovely sister!"

Miss Stahl seemed overcome with emotion, and murmured, in broken sentences, expressions of fervent gratitude and affection.

At length she said, "Do you know, dear Effie, I misjudged you when you met me just now. I fancied that you were not quite pleased to see me—that your manner was somewhat cool."

"Did I not always wish you to be my dearest friend, Olive? No doubt your misconception arose from my husband having taught me to suppress my feelings."

"I am thoroughly satisfied, darling, and only mentioned it on the impulse of the moment."

Olive quickly changed her traveling dress for a pale blue crape, with a knot of crimson roses fastened in her hair and bosom.

She entered the dining-room; her bright face and attractive manner threw quite a beam of sunshine between the serious, timid young wife and the grave, austere husband.

Never had Effie seen him so cheerful, genial and debonair as now, and never had she felt the restraint of his authority so lifted from off herself.

They lingered over the tea-table, chatting pleasantly of old times and of the city gayeties, when Mrs. Stanhope led Olive into the drawing-room, saying: "Now, dear Malpas, you shall have a musical treat. I do so want you to hear our friend sing."

"How impetuous you are!" he replied; "Miss Stahl may be too fatigued to sing to-night, and it would be too much to tax her kindness."

"Oh, no," Olive returned; "you need not fear. I am not at all tired now. Mrs. Stanhope has told me of your vocal powers. Will you join me in a duet?"

Mendelssohn's "Oh, would that my love," was selected, and her rich strains blended with his, and filled the room with delightful melody.

Time passed away unheeded; it was near upon the stroke of midnight at the close of the last of Olive's songs, when she arose from the piano, her countenance elevated and glowing with the inspiration of the music. Both husband and wife were silent with deep emotion, wrapt in ecstasy.

When Olive retired that night she heard a light footstep approach her bed, and, looking

up, she saw Effie standing in her night-robes, looking down upon her with affection and love.

"When I had lain down, dear Olive, I found I had forgotten to put my arms round your neck to give you my usual kiss, as we did in our old school-days, and to draw your curtains as I used to do."

Stooping down, she murmured, as she clasped her arms around her swan-like neck, "Good-night again, dearest Olive, and may Heaven bless and guard you!" And she stole noiselessly from the room. This was Olive's welcome to Rosemount.

CHAPTER V.

WAS SHE HEARTLESS?

A FEW days after Olive's installation at Rosemount, she and Mrs. Stanhope were in the nursery playing with little Bluebell, the pet name Effie had given her child.

They were having a confidential chat at the same time.

"By the way, Effie, where's your friend, Mr. Gordon? I have quite a curiosity to see him."

"He is away, Olive, on a shooting-expedition, and Maude is staying with some friends in Albany. I have not told you that they were engaged—there's a bit of news! Maude will be here next week; her aunt has a charming place about two miles from here. You must go over and see it, dear. Mr. Gordon will also return toward the end of next week, so you will soon have the opportunity of seeing our turtle-doves. Fancy our beautiful, stately Maude being subjugated and caught in the toils of love."

"I cannot imagine her playing the role of a love-sick maiden," Olive replied, with a contemptuous shrug of her shoulders. "What manner of a man can this be that has aimed love's shaft into the eyes and heart of the proud Maude Garthwaite?"

"Oh, he's a dear fellow," Effie replied; "a regular good-natured giant, and stands six feet four in his stockings."

"I don't think I should care for him, then; I'm not taken by size and quantity."

"I'm glad to hear you say so," laughed Mrs. Stanhope, "for I really had my misgivings, my beautiful Olive, as to even presenting him to you, for I look upon you as a red-light danger-signal."

"Oh, you need not fear; Maude's giant will be safe," she said, with a meaning smile. "But how short-breathed you are, dear!" she said, keenly regarding her friend, as Effie paused in speaking and pressed her hand upon her chest.

"No, love; only when I talk much, or walk up many stairs, my breath seems labored and I feel a difficulty in respiration." And as she spoke, her face flushed.

"What a lovely color you have now. Why you've entirely lost that sallow complexion you had at school!" Olive said, as she looked at Effie's burning cheeks.

"Yes, my complexion has cleared; I am glad of it, for I like to be a little bright-looking on my dear husband's account."

The ladies soon separated, one on household duties intent, the other to the library.

Miss Stahl took a medical work from the book-shelf and opened the leaves at the ominous title "Consumption," and perused it attentively.

Closing the book, she muttered low: "Yes; Effie Stanhope is doomed. No one sees in the brilliant hectic flush, bright eyes, and high spirits of the once pale girl, the burning of a hidden fire that is consuming her life—no one but me. Well, perhaps after all—"

She dropped into a silent reverie.

A clear, silvery, happy laugh rung out upon the air, and like an angel's mandate dispelled the clouds of evil passions that were gathering in Olive's breast.

They shrunk down into the depths of her heart, like the guilty things they were, as Effie's sweet laugh floated upon the air.

She came in like a bright vision, with Bluebell toddling by her side, her little hands filled with luscious peaches.

Gaining Olive's side; the child threw her curden into her lap in childish glee, lisping "For 'oo—all for 'oo; Bubell pick 'em; papa held Bubell up high. Me loves you, pooty Aunty Olive."

Catching up the pretty prattler, a feeling of almost remorse possessed her heart as she caressed and kissed Effie's little child.

Olive's desire was at last gratified—Mr. Gordon was presented to her at a dinner-party given on his return by her host and hostess, and the effect upon Cyril Gordon may be imagined from the strain of admiration that broke from his lips as he took leave of Mr. Stanhope.

"A glorious creature!" he exclaimed. "Malpas, a superb woman—the *chef d'œuvre* of nature—

Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!"

"Don't rave, Cyril; anybody would think that you were studying for the drama. I detest rodomontade of any kind," he remarked, coldly.

"What on earth's the matter with Stanhope?" thought Gordon, as he rode away. "I never saw him so short-tempered in my life. Plague on him, what's he mean by it? He's not mad enough to be in love with her himself? Oh, no; away with such a fearful thought!" And he dug his heels into his horse regardless of the pain he was inflicting upon the inoffensive animal.

The next day found him wending his way up the gravel path with one intent longing to see and speak to the beautiful visitor.

Taking advantage of a moment when he was unobserved, he slipped a piece of paper into the hand of Miss Stahl.

When Olive and her hostess were alone she placed the paper in the hands of Mrs. Stanhope, saying, "This was given me to-day by Mr. Gordon." Opening it, Effie read:

"Oh! would that we had met before! Ere yet that fatal vow was spoken."

"What does he mean?" Olive asked. "Can you explain it?"

"Yes, I fear too well," she said, in a tone of vexation. "He has fallen in love with you, and it will break poor Maude's heart; that's what it means. Oh, Olive, do repulse him sharply; affront him; insult him; do anything rather than encourage him."

"I shall not repulse him very sharply," thought Olive, as she sunk to sleep. "He may be useful to me, and Miss Maude must take care of herself."

Mrs. Stanhope was seriously disturbed—so much so, that upon retiring to her own room she communicated her fears to her husband. His brows darkened, and his utterance became hoarse as he said: "It cannot be true; he would not so far dare speak of love to the young lady that we have admitted to our home and hearts, knowing his engagement to Maude."

"It came to me from Olive herself," said Effie, who devoutly wished now she had never mentioned the matter.

"I must take immediate steps to put an effectual stop to his base designs. Mark me, Effie, he must receive no encouragement from you, or enter our family circle again until he has purged himself of his offense."

It was in vain that his gentle-hearted wife pleaded for Gordon's forgiveness. Stanhope was inexorable, and showed more temper over the matter than he had ever done when things of more serious moment had ruffled him.

Poor Effie! she little dreamed that her husband was moved by a deeper, stronger passion than mere resentment could arouse.

Olive's beauty had stolen into his very brain; her charm of manner and unrivaled talents caused him to contrast her with the woman whom he had sworn to love and cherish above all others, and Effie had suffered depreciation at his eyes.

CHAPTER VI.

MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

At this time Maude Garthwaite came on a visit to the Stanhopes, to the delight of Effie, but to the chagrin and annoyance of Olive, who thoroughly detested the beautiful high-spirited girl, and determined to crush and destroy her happiness, because of the place she held in Mr. Stanhope's heart.

With a fixed and deadly purpose she set to work, and turned her beautiful but evil eyes upon Maude's lover, with the intention only of befooling him.

Their approaching wedding was the topic of the New York season, and bid fair to be a most brilliant affair, as Maude was wealthy and one of the latest belles, and had passed the last season in Washington society, where her peculiar style of beauty had become the rage.

Had this beautiful siren no conscience? Was she dead to all womanly feeling? Yes; her mind was given to perversity, jealousy, and vanity; and though Cyril Gordon was on the eve of marriage, she held him enthralled, enchained, bewitched.

One morning Mrs. Stanhope was surprised and shocked by Maude, who, in a paroxysm of grief, burst into the room, exclaiming: "Dear Effie, I am perfectly miserable, and I wish I were dead! I can bear it no longer! I wish I could die and break his heart!" she continued, sobbing; "he no longer loves me now."

"My dear Maude," replied her friend, tenderly, "what is the meaning of all this? You have had a lovers' quarrel, and perhaps, dear, you are a little jealous."

"A saint would be jealous—an angel would, to see the cold way in which he treats me now!"

"Oh, my dear, cast away such thoughts; they are not worthy of you."

"Have I not eyes to see that he is madly infatuated with Olive? They are sitting in the music-room now, she singing an impassioned love-song, and he bending over, gazing into her face with a look of adoration! Such worship! Oh, it drives me mad to think of it!" she said, stamping her foot.

"Come, come," Effie said, tenderly; "I feel sure he is true to you at heart. Be comforted; he is your betrothed, and should not be condemned and sentenced unheard. Dear Olive, I feel sure, is giving him no encouragement."

"I wish I could see Olive with the same eyes that you can," returned Maude, with a sigh.

"Do not say anything rash, dear Maude."

"You need not fear that I shall try to open your eyes to the true character of your protegee. Time will work wonders."

"Hush! It pains me; I will hear no more."

Taking Maude's hand in hers she said, "Tell Cyril that his conduct annoys you, and that you cannot permit his seeming attentions to Olive; and remember, dearest Maude, that jealousy never prevents, but frequently suggests, the very infidelity that it fears."

Following her friend's advice she sought out Cyril, and, her eyes flashing with anger, demanded an explanation.

One word brought up another, and tearing her engagement ring from her finger and casting it at his feet, she exclaimed, with a look of scorn, "Take back your ring and pledge; you promised more than you could perform!"

With the air of an empress she left Cyril looking very woebegone and crestfallen.

The next day Maude was sitting alone, sulking, pouting and sobbing between whiles, regretting her hasty temper, and feeling she had nothing more to live for; all seemed dark and hopeless.

She was aroused from her unhappy reverie by a hesitating step and Cyril entered the room with a deprecating air.

She turned and looked out of the window to conceal her tear-stained eyes.

This gesture looked so much like contempt and anger that he hastened to say: "Permit me one moment, Maude, to intrude upon you to say that, however free you may consider yourself, I feel myself bound by honor to ful-

fill our engagement, and therefore shall never marry while you remain single. Now, let us part friends."

She turned, and the tears were welling fast in her lovely eyes as she held out both her hands, which Cyril caught and imprisoned, exclaiming, rapturously, "Ah, that's my own sweet Maude—my own darling! If you knew what I have borne last night and to-day, feeling that I had lost your love and confidence, even you, angry as you were, would have pitied me!"

"I am deeply sorry if I have pained you needlessly, dear Cyril," she said, with a blush; "but I thought you had ceased to love me. And I think I may say that I have suffered. You bad boy! But you will admit you did admire Olive? Come; speak the truth, sir, and shame the—"

She didn't finish her sentence, for he caught her in his strong arms, and sealed her pretty lips with warm, loving kisses.

"Now, my darling, hold out your finger," he said, when he released her, "and put on your badge;" and he replaced the small circle on her finger. "And now, my darling Maude, as you see, I never do things by halves; you shall be my father confessor, and 'I to thee will a tale unfold!'—this with a roguish smile.

"Perhaps it would be just as well if you kept it to yourself, Mr. Impudence, as I've not quite forgiven you yet! You didn't think I saw you beaming over Olive's shoulders, making eyes, etc., etc."

"Maude," he said, pleadingly, "I swear that not one thought has strayed from you, though I admit candidly that her society had a certain glamour and interest for me. She was evidently bent upon subduing me, and I saw through her little game, and determined to pay her off in her own coin. I love you, dearest, more and more, from the great contrast that you present to this shameless flirt!"

Peace was declared, the storm had cleared, and two loving hearts were united firmer and stronger for the dark clouds that had arisen, and which threatened at one time to overcast and blight their lives.

Mrs. Duncan's house on Madison avenue was filled with the *creme de la creme* of fashion; all that was wealthy and great were congregated at the reception given after the wedding of her beautiful niece, Maude Garthwaite.

A more lovely bride the sun never shone upon; and so her flue, manly bridegroom thought as she stood at the altar, with her virgin robes falling gracefully from her queen-like form.

The sun's rays, through the rich stained glass windows, penetrated the grand old church, and reflected its glorious beams on her sunny tresses, and threw a halo of almost unearthly splendor on her regal brow.

Effie stood by the side of Maude; and felt sincerely gratified that two young hearts had been brought together at last, and that no misunderstandings were ever likely to come between them again.

CHAPTER VII.

SNATCHED FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH.

EFFIE'S state of health about this time was such as to cause her husband and friends serious anxiety.

Malpas Stanhope was not a bad man at heart—bad in the acceptance of the term in society, for he did not intentionally neglect his wife in any way; but underlying his demeanor there was an indifference that amounted to what might be termed negative cruelty.

He had started life with Effie in the conviction that he loved her, and no doubt the feeling of affection he had for her would have ripened into the maturer fruit of love if Olive Stahl had not crossed his path and poisoned the springs of his heart's affections.

Naturally ambitious, he longed for a wife who would, both by her beauty and accom-

plishments, be a queen of society, and shine in his firmament as a constellation that would bring homage and make him talked about as the proud possessor of men's admiration and women's envy.

Olive Stahl promised all this, and more; but she had fallen across his path too late, when he was married to a gentle being like Effie, who was never so happy as when enjoying home-life, with all its endearing ties and domestic interests.

So it came to pass that his wife was fading away before his very eyes, uncomplaining, and it gave him quite a shock when Olive called his attention to the fact, saying, "Dear Mr. Stanhope, I fear that Effie wants a thorough change of scene. Have you not noticed how pale and ill she is looking? I am her constant companion, and cannot shut my eyes to the truth."

"What would you advise?" he said.

"An immediate change of air and scene."

"But my political duties, Miss Stahl, and other matters of great interest, will preclude my traveling just at present."

Olive's rich red lips curled with proud disdain and her eyes flashed scornfully, as she said: "Is a wife of so little importance in your eyes, Mr. Stanhope, that you cannot make even so small a sacrifice for her? If a man dared put so small a value on me, I would make him feel that he had made a mistake!"

"You are severe," he said, with a smile.

"And you are heartless!" she was about to retort, but checked the impulse in time, contenting herself with saying, "I speak as a woman. Forgive me if my warmth has tempted me to exceed the limits of politeness! But you will do what I ask, for dear Effie's sake!"

Taking her hand he looked at her with an expression that caused her eyes to droop under his ardent gaze, as he said, "For your sake, Miss Stahl, as well as for my wife's, I will do as you wish."

She withdrew her hand from him, not caring to let him see that his words or looks could have any effect upon her, or that she had discovered the secret of his growing love for her.

"I will run away to Effie," she said, "and tell her the good news. Poor darling! she will be delighted to hear that you are to accompany her. I discussed the project with her some days ago, but she declined entertaining it, because you would be unable, she thought, to make one of the party."

After Olive had left him he paced the room in a state of nervous agitation, battling against the temptation that always assailed him when she was alone with him, to speak to her of his love, and to beg her to wait until he could make her his wife, knowing well that she would never assume any other position than that, however skillfully the temptation should be placed before her.

"I can do nothing but think of her!" he cried, passionately; "and betray myself at times by my looks, and in the tone of my voice, which is more tender in expression when addressing her than Effie, even!"

When all the arrangements had been completed, the party started for Newport, the resort of fashionable society, so much affected by the *elite*, on account of its freedom from the poorer classes who invade most seaside places, and rightly so, too, for are not the fresh sea-breezes and vast expanse of ocean quite as free to the poor as to the rich, considering that they are all the gifts of nature?

Effie enjoyed the change very much; nor could she, indeed, help doing so, for yachts came and went, sands glittered, the music sounded.

There was a charming blue sea, a balmy, fluttering breeze, and groups of fashionable people from all the leading cities, promenading the piazzas of the hotels, smoking, flirting, or gossiping, as the mood was upon them. All was animation and gayety, and no one could look upon the scene and feel dull.

Olive felt in her element, and came in for her full share of admiration from the men of

fashion, who longed to make the acquaintance of such a queen of beauty.

Malpas Stanhope was bored by the whole affair, and but for Olive's presence, he would have cursed the ill-luck that took him away from possible political triumphs to spend his time among a set of fashionable idlers, whose only aim in life seemed to be to kill time.

The second day after their arrival, Olive sprung out of bed, and throwing open the blinds, allowed the sun in all its golden splendor to pour into her chamber.

"This is enjoying existence!" she murmured. "How I long to be rich and independent! Effie is very kind, and Malpas" (she always spoke thus familiarly when communing with herself)—"is, if anything, too generous. I have beauty, talents—at least, so I am told—and the world is before me. Why should I not strike out a course for myself, and win a prize!"

Then there floated before her mind's eye the possibility of her becoming the wife of Malpas Stanhope; for she could not shut her eyes to the fact that Effie's state of health was such as might produce fatal results at any time.

She went down, and strolled out of the house, along the yellow sands, drinking in the ozone from the ocean, and feeling light-hearted, and almost merry, under the exhilarating influences of the scene. Although it was early, numbers of people were about, bathing, or quietly sauntering along to woo an appetite.

Olive was a capital swimmer; and the morning being fine, and every condition favorable, she resolved to enjoy a bathe.

The water was so deliciously warm that she was tempted to swim out a considerable distance, looking as she floated on the wavelets like a lovely mermaid—a siren of the deep, with glittering drops sparkling on her dark tresses like diamonds.

Suddenly she felt that she was being carried along, as if by some invisible agency; and although she struggled to free herself from the grip of the insidious current, she was borne swiftly to what appeared to her to be certain death.

She cast a backward glance at the shore, eager to ascertain if her danger had been perceived; but no, she appeared to be doomed.

A bitter, black anguish filled her heart, and her soul rebelled against the seeming decree of Fate, which so cruelly destined her to an agonizing death at a time when life was bright, full of hope, aims, and pleasurable excitement.

Gulls screamed overhead, as if to mock her; and the hum of the treacherous current sounded in her ears like the mystic voice of the angel of death.

She threw up first one white arm and then the other from mere instinct, hoping that they might be seen, and bring her the aid she so sorely needed; for, indeed, her strength was failing her, and she knew that she could not sustain herself above water much longer. She was being swept past a rock which projected some distance into the sea, when her eyes caught sight of a familiar figure standing there.

"It is Malpas, and he loves me! Oh! help, help!"

Her cries, uttered more shrilly than the scream of the eagle, reached him. Looking, he saw a face that was dear to him in his dreams, and haunted him by day.

Was this an illusion?—a mere vision of a disordered brain?—a fantasy, created by an intense longing? No; that cry, like a death-wail, came to him again, and filled his soul with agony.

One plunge, and then he struck out vigorously in her direction, shouting, "Olive, keep up! I am coming!"

She heard his voice, and waved her white hand, as if to bid him adieu.

"Great Heaven," he cried; "she will sink before I reach her!"

He was near her now, and could see the whiteness of her beautiful face, and the appealing, almost agonized expression of her glorious

eyes: and his hand almost clutched her, when she disappeared from view, leaving him glaring at the spot where so great a treasure had been swallowed up.

He dived and missed her.

There, just before him, as if luring him on to destruction, she rose again, and then disappeared, as if to mock him.

He was desperate now, racing with death; bone, sinew, muscle, brain, all engaged in the struggle which could only be sharp and swift, like an electric flash, however it might eventuate.

Another dive, long and glorious this time, like a soldier charging a destroying battery, and he clutched a soft, warm, yielding substance. His heart sent up a cry of joy, although his lips were sealed by the sea. Not death, nor any power, visible or invisible, could snatch her from him now!

She was in his grasp, and together they rose to the surface, with the sun shining brightly and the hum of life around them.

He was full of vigor, she seemingly lifeless, as he drew her unresisting head on his shoulder.

"Have I been too late?" he thought. "Has the jewel left the lovely casket? No; it cannot be! Speak to me, Olive, my darling!"

A shout attracted his attention; steering down upon them was a yacht. It was near at hand, and a friendly rope was thrown to him, which he grasped with an almost delirious cry of joy, for the succor had not come a moment too soon.

Both were soon in safety, and busy hands were quickly at work trying to win back the ebbing spark of life to Olive, who lay limp and motionless, with drooped eyelids and partially opened mouth.

"You must really control yourself, sir," said the owner of the yacht to Stanhope, who was acting like a madman, calling her by every endearing name, as he pushed the men aside to gaze with a frenzied look at that dear face, into which no sign of returning life had as yet come.

By the time the vessel had reached the beach, Olive was out of danger, and she was quickly conveyed home, where a doctor was called in and completed her restoration.

The shock which Effie received when she heard of the double blow which had almost descended to crush her, quite undid the benefit she had derived from her stay.

She loved Olive dearly, and felt that if she, as well as Malpas, had been taken from her, there would be nothing left to live for.

If Stanhope had had any doubt of the true state of his heart toward Olive, it was now set at rest forever by that sharp struggle to snatch her from the very jaws of death.

When Olive moved about in the busy world again, how bright and beautiful everything appeared to her, even to the commonest objects of nature!

There was a greater significance in the song of the lark, as with thrilling melody it soared toward the sun, as if to be nearer heaven and that great Being who had called it into life.

The murmur of the ocean, too, sounded sweetly to her, and brought back, with a great throb of thankfulness, the recollection of the sounds of death that had chilled her heart and frozen her very being.

Her brave preserver's heroic conduct was the theme of conversation, and numerous were the invitations that flowed in upon him and his family circle.

There was a perpetual song of gladness in his heart now, although his poor little wife ought to have been a source of grave anxiety to him. It was Olive he rejoiced over, feeling now that she belonged to him by no ordinary tie, for had he not saved her life, given it back to her, as it were, when it seemed to be utterly lost to her forever?

Stanhope received an invitation to a ball, and was on the point of declining it on account of his wife's state of health, when she said:

"I really feel much better, Malpas, and would like us all to go. The physician says a little pleasurable excitement would do me good, and I need not dance, you know."

This decided the matter, and showed the self-sacrificing side of Effie's character, who wished that Olive should thoroughly enjoy herself.

The ladies formed a striking contrast as they entered the magnificent suit of rooms on the arm of Mr. Stanhope.

A buzz of inquiring admiration followed their arrival and made him feel proud, more especially on Olive's account, for, in his estimation, she was fitted to receive the homage of an emperor.

Olive's dress was a *chef d'œuvre*, and added to her Spanish type of beauty and voluptuousness.

"It was a rich amber satin, embroidered with jet beads, and displayed her beautiful neck and shoulders of polished whiteness; yellow amethysts gleamed in her hair and shone like flashing meteors on her arms and bosom; her *tout ensemble* was completed by a fan of black ostrich feathers, studded with jewels.

She looked a veritable Cleopatra by the side of the gentle girl-wife, who was dressed in pearl-gray satin, and whose eyes glittered with the fire of incipient consumption, outvying the glittering diamonds she wore.

It was a brilliant assemblage of men and women of *ton*, among whom were an English lord and a French baron.

"I do not think I shall dance much to-night, dear Effie," Olive said.

"Why, my darling?"

"Because I do not care to leave you," as she looked into that suffering, wistful face, and saw how disease had left its fatal mark there.

"You will only make me miserable, Olive. I shall enjoy sitting here as a looker-on. Besides, Malpas will not forget me. Do enjoy yourself, or I shall consider myself a veritable wet blanket."

Olive was quickly besieged with quite a host of aspirants for the honor of placing their names down on her tablets.

She was essentially a woman who was fitted by nature to enjoy such a triumph as this, and abandoned herself to the sweet intoxication of the hour, oblivious of Malpas and Effie, and bending her pink ear to drink in the delicious flattery of her admirers.

Stanhope stood by the side of his wife, his eyes greedily following the movements of Olive. When she smiled sweetly, in acknowledgment of honeyed words and courtly phrases, he frowned until his brow became as black as thunder.

Effie saw all this, and it caused her pain for a moment to think that he had given more than friendship's affection to the magnificent woman whom she had taken to her heart as a dear sister.

But she was too pure and good to think evil of others, and dismissed the thought with a feeling of proud contempt.

A sudden faintness came over her, and placing her hand upon her husband's arm, she whispered, "I feel ill, Malpas. Take me home!" and then became unconscious.

He carried her into an ante-room, where she was attended by a doctor who happened to be present.

An hour later, she was seen by a celebrated physician, who advised her removal by easy stages to her home.

CHAPTER VII.

TO FORGIVE IS DIVINE.

No skill could ward off the impending blow that was at hand. The fell destroyer had marked Effie for his own.

She was very feeble, and longed with a childish yearning, to be back again at Rosemount, and little Olive was also sadly in need of the bracing air of a cooler climate.

They were compelled to travel slowly upon Effie's account; she suffered intensely from lassitude and fatigue.

As soon as they arrived home she was conveyed to her own chamber in a state of complete exhaustion.

"It is only weariness, dear Malpas. Go down and join Olive at dinner, my love; Fanchette can bring me some tea and a little piece of chicken. I shall be quite well by to-morrow morning, and then I will have Robin brought round, and ride along the lake with you, as we used when we were first married."

How delightful the scenery and the beautiful landscape appeared upon the morning after her arrival, as she sat by the open window of her bed-chamber, looking out upon the green and dewy lawn, bespangled with clumps of gorgeous-hued geraniums and golden calceolarias, and with roses of every color, the heavy dewdrops bearing them down, and wafting their sweet perfume to steep her senses in pleasure and content!

The sun was rising, golden clouds were sailing majestically, and millions of dewdrops were flashing back the light.

The joyous, thrilling songs of birds were filling the air with music, and Effie's heart swelled with gratitude and enjoyment, as she luxuriated in the scene.

Her husband entered the room and said: "Well, Effie, are you not going to join us at breakfast?"

"No, dear; Olive is going to send me up a cup of coffee. I do not feel quite strong enough, and my head swims."

"I will send for Doctor Kingsford directly after breakfast, my dear," he said, tenderly.

"There is no occasion—it's only weakness. I'm sure I shall be able to join you at dinner; I begin to feel better already, since I have been sitting at this window, dear Malpas. What a happiness it is to be at home again. And this place," she said, looking affectionately up into her husband's face, "has such delicious associations for me."

"Effie, love," he returned, with a twinge of compunction softening his heart, "you know you promised last evening to ride out with me to-day."

"Oh, yes! I will be so pleased to go; and Olive can accompany us."

"No, no, Effie—no, no! We will not take Miss Stahl this time. I want one of our old rides."

"Do you, Malpas?" asked his wife with a pretty, winning smile. "Oh, I shall be so pleased. But don't look at me so pitifully—don't be uneasy about me, love—I'm very well, only tired. Go down to breakfast now or your coffee and cutlets will be cold."

The contemplated ride was not taken, neither did Mrs. Stanhope join her family at dinner, for her weariness increased as the day advanced. She kept to her chamber, as she said, "to have a thorough rest after the fatigue of her journey."

Upon that evening, Stanhope, allured by the fascinations of Olive's society, left the dinner-table and adjourned to the drawing-room, where he became enchained by the thrilling melody of her voice.

The impassioned music and her radiant countenance conspired to endanger the good resolves and self-command which he had imposed upon himself ever since the serious illness of his wife.

Her eyes caught his earnest gaze, but she was determined to keep him from the brink of a precipice, and herself too.

She turned the tide of his thoughts by saying abruptly, "Your wife is dying! Are you blind to the truth, Malpas Stanhope?"

"No; it is too true. Leave me, Olive."

Her words had quite subdued him.

Autumn waned, the leaves of the trees were beginning to fall, shriveled and brown, to be crushed under foot, and Mrs. Stanhope lay upon her death-bed. She was sinking fast; she had just awakened from a troubled sleep.

The subject of her dreams was her little Bluebell, and beckoning Olive to her side, she said:

"Bring me my darling. I want to take a long and last farewell before my eyes get dim, and I shall no longer be able to trace her features. I want to carry her sweet image with me through the valley of the shadow of death!"

Olive instantly brought the child to the bedside, and its sweet face broke into a glad smile as it tried to clasp its mother around the neck.

The excitement was too much for the poor dying sufferer, and Olive was compelled to take little Bluebell away.

"Oo sal not take Bubell from her mama, naughty Olive!" the child said, stamping her foot; "and I sal tiss her!"

At this moment Malpas entered his wife's room. He was pale, dusty, and travel-stained; he had been telegraphed for, and had only just arrived. With a cry of joy, she tried to raise herself, but he caught her in his strong arms, and her head sunk like a tired child's upon his bosom.

"My Effie, my own dear wife!" he groaned, in an anguish of remorse.

"Heaven bless you for coming, dear husband! Oh, I have longed for you so! I have listened, and watched, and waited; and now I hold you—oh, joy! your arms support me—I rest upon your bosom once more, and I feel the beating of your heart against mine!" she said, in an almost inaudible voice.

"My own dear Effie—my faithful, loving wife!" he said, as he laid her gently back upon the pillow.

New life appeared to be infused into Effie. Her soul seemed no longer fluttering on the eve of flight. Her eyes were bright as stars, and her whole countenance irradiated.

Miss Stahl had taken the child and left the room, and husband and wife were alone.

Taking her fragile hands in his, and kneeling at her bedside, he said:

"My own dear wife, can you forgive me for the many slights and injuries I have inflicted upon you?—God knows I cannot forgive myself! My angel wife, live for my sake! I will try to be worthy of you. I cannot part with you, for I love you so dearly!"

"God bless you, my darling husband, for that word, but it is better as it is. I know you *once* did love me, and that you have fought a bitter conflict. I know all," she whispered, "and I say I forgive you freely, and may Heaven bless you!"

Raising her feeble hands, she placed them around his neck, drew his head down to her bosom, and kissed him long and tenderly.

"My angel wife, I have injured you, but only in thought! Oh, would that I could die! And yet you can forgive such a wretch as I!"

"Be comforted, dear husband. My life was cold, and dark, and barren until you took me to your heart; and I have had four years of blessed wedded happiness with light, warmth, and joy! And now send for Olive."

Stanhope fetched her immediately.

"Now I can die in peace," said the sufferer, as she placed the hand of Olive in that of her husband. "Now you can love her without sin, and I shall await your coming above."

And they stood, the weak man by the side of Effie's dearly-loved school-friend, who had proved so false-hearted.

As she stood beside that pure soul that was winging its flight, she shrunk with awe, trembling like an aspen, for remorse at last had smote her ambitious soul.

Throwing herself in an abandonment of despair and grief by her friend's side, she prayed and pleaded for forgiveness.

"Dearest Olive, I have nothing to forgive. You were created for love. Your great beauty even inspired me with that feeling. When we were school-girls together I was always plain, and I can never be grateful enough for the love my darling husband lavished upon so unworthy and unlovable a girl as I."

"Oh, dearest Effie," she sobbed, "you are more than beautiful—you are divine!"

"Will you grant me one favor, as you love

me, and be a mother to my darling? Take my place and do not let her feel the want of me. She is so young that I fear she will miss me, poor darling!"

"I promise; she shall be my sacred charge to my life's end!"

"I feel tired, and want to sleep," Effie murmured; and with one hand in her husband's, the other in that of Olive, she sunk into a slight slumber.

Night was closing in when she awoke and said faintly, "Bring me my child; lay her by my side."

Bluebell was brought and laid by her mother.

Her husband sat beside her, and held one little hand in his strong clasp; the other was around little Bluebell.

And so she sunk to sleep, murmuring her child and husband's name.

He tried to catch her almost inaudible words, but she had relapsed at last into silence.

Gradually her hand in his grew very cold. He placed his finger upon her pulse; but, alas! it would never beat again—Effie Stanhope had passed from this world of trouble to realms of happiness and bliss.

CHAPTER IX.

RECRIMINATIONS.

TWELVE months have passed since the gentle, confiding Effie was consigned to the tomb. Stanhope left Rosemount immediately after her funeral, at the urgent request of Olive, and she during the time became mistress of the establishment, and guardian to the little motherless child.

She was sitting alone in the drawing-room, deep in thought, when a servant announced the master of the house.

In another moment Malpas Stanhope was standing before her, holding both her hands, gazing into her eyes.

He spoke no word, but that impassioned gaze was an eloquent explanation.

She, too, was still and silent. She felt her strength was going; he seemed to have the power to wile it from her. No other man on earth possessed this spell over her.

With his hands clasped in hers, and his eyes drinking in her well-beloved features, like as the thirsty earth drinks in the rain, he said:

"Olive, I have waited for you, Heaven knows how patiently, although in spirit I was never absent from your side. Do not prolong my pain; let this weary longing cease, and be mine!"

Kneeling as if she were a deity and he a worshiper, he sought by every tender persuasion, by word and look, to win from her trembling lips the expression of her love for him.

Cold indeed must the nature have been that could long resist such passionate pleadings.

Gradually her head sunk on his shoulder, and her lips murmured his name.

Their bliss was too ecstatic for words, their hearts beat in unison, and their faces were irradiated with joy.

All he could murmur was "Olive!"

Thus his voice luxuriated and dwelt on this all-absorbing theme.

No woman could move him to such depths of joy or misery as she at whose feet he knelt.

The blood coursed swiftly through his veins, and her slightest touch of tone inspired him with rapturous delight.

Rising, he drew her to him, and looking down upon her upturned face, said:

"I have a boon to crave, darling."

"How can I deny you anything when I have given you my heart, my all?"

"Business takes me abroad to Paris. I shall leave for there in about a month. You will not refuse to accompany me as my wife? What are mere formalities to us—all the trumpery finery that the outside world counts so dear? Tell me that you will!"

"I could have wished it otherwise, but will say yes."

The bridal morning dawned fair and beauti-

ful, like the face of an earthly bride preparing for the mid-day ceremony which would bring her happiness to its zenith.

Malpas Stanhope was up betimes, waiting to meet a small circle of select friends—bride-maids, best man, and others—when his eyes fell upon a letter addressed to him which had come the night before by the last post.

The handwriting was strange to him, and he was about to pass the epistle by unheeded, when he saw that it contained the New York postmark.

As he had written there on a matter of business connected with his approaching departure from home he opened the envelope and ran his eye over its contents.

He started as if stung by some venomous reptile, and the letter fell to the ground, together with the photograph which had been inclosed.

"Can it be possible?" he said, as his face grew pale and stern, and his eyes gleamed with anger. "Have I been deceived in her, and am I now to be punished for loving her so passionately even in poor Effie's lifetime?"

Picking up the letter and photo, he read the former carefully, with knitted brows and compressed lips, and then looked critically at the portrait, murmuring, "Heavens! how like her it is; and yet I have heard from her own lips that I am the only man she ever loved!"

A fierce struggle was going on in his mind, embittering his joy, and making him feel that punishment was being meted out to him at the very moment when the cup of happiness was being pressed to his lips. The letter which occasioned him such anguish ran thus:

"DEAR SIR:—Although I hate letter-writing, yet I feel it incumbent on me to take my pen in hand to warn you to avoid taking a step which might plunge you into life-long misery and despair. I see by the papers that you are about to lead to the altar a certain Miss Olive Stahl; there are rumors floating about connected with this lady which ought to make it your duty to ascertain something of her antecedents before allowing her to bear your name.

"In haste, yours very sincerely,

ROY TOLMACHE.

"P. S.—I inclose a photo of the lady.—R. T."

His first impulse was of mad precipitancy and violent denunciation of her deceit, not only toward himself, but his dead wife.

He caught sight of himself in the mirror, and started at the almost satanic expression of his face.

"And this is my wedding morning!" he muttered. "Oh, Olive, I love you, I love you! How can I bear to part from you whom I have made the idol of my soul?"

He seated himself, and bending his head on his hands, tried to calm his mind and to drive away the evil thoughts and suspicions which assailed him.

When he had succeeded in this, and his brain became clearer, and he could grasp the situation, he perceived how dangerous it would have been for him to accuse a woman of her proud spirit of having played a double part.

"She cannot be guilty," he thought; "she is too noble, and I will trust her; and may Heaven grant that my confidence may not be misplaced!"

The bells rung out a merry peal a few hours later, as the bridal-party drove away from the door of Rosemount under arches of evergreens and waving banners; the drive being lined by all the servants in their holiday attire, who cheered the bonny bride and the manly bridegroom, in anticipation of the happy event.

Olive was a general favorite with the servants, as during her twelve months' tenure as mistress of Rosemount she had proved herself a "Lady Bountiful" in the truest sense of the words.

The grand old church was decorated with flowers, and looked quite a pastoral picture, that could not do otherwise than calm the mind and delight the eye.

The monuments of departed dead looked down upon the group at the church door and the sun shone upon a lovely piece of statuary, erected to the memory of Effie.

As Olive looked up at the sacred memento

of her lost friend, Effie, tears glistened in her glorious eyes, and her lips moved in silent prayer that Heaven would enable her to be a good wife to Malpas and a tender mother to Bluebell.

As she stood there in all her regal beauty, robed in a shimmer of snowy lace and satin, with soft pearls and diamonds that trembled and gleamed in her jetty hair and heaving bosom, and clasped her soft round arms, she presented a living, glowing picture of womanly beauty not easily surpassed, or, once seen, effaced from the mind.

Mrs. Gordon and her husband were present—he as best man, she as Olive's nearest and dearest friend.

Little toddling Bluebell, though the smallest of the bridesmaids, was not the least in importance; she assumed quite a grave air of responsibility as she held in her tiny dimpled hands the bride's fan and handkerchief.

The sonorous tones of the clergyman rung out in the hushed stillness, "Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder," and as they fell upon the ears of the husband, he thought exultantly, "She is mine now forever!"

But in the midst of his sense of security there came the thought of that letter which dimmed his happiness like a dark cloud in a summer sky, and a shudder ran through his frame as the tips of her gloved hand rested lightly and lovingly on his arm, for she was now his wife in reality, ready to pour forth the rich treasures of her heart at his feet.

The poison of jealousy had become instilled into his mind, though he stood before the altar with her at his side in all her virgin loveliness and purity.

A few hours later the happy pair were speeding on their way to Saratoga to spend a portion of their honeymoon there before starting on their trip abroad.

The train bore them off, and rushed forward into the gathering gloom of twilight.

She nestled close to him, wondering why he was so silent, and put it down to excess of happiness on his part.

Presently she chid him playfully, when he grasped her arm in almost a vise-like grip, and said, in a tone of suppressed emotion:

"Answer me truly, Olive—ought we two to have become man and wife?"

Her cheek paled for the moment, and her eyes quailed under his passionate, searching gaze; but the returning blood soon painted her cheeks scarlet, and the brilliancy of indignation shone in her dark eyes as she said, haughtily:

"Malpas, explain yourself! I have been your wife but a few short hours, and yet you ask me such a question!"

He was silent under the scathing rebuke, cursing his folly for having blundered in his attempt to gain her confidence.

"Has excess of happiness turned your brain?" she continued, in a tone of veiled satire that was more galling to him than the bitterest reproach. "Why did you not ask the question before our hands, if not *your* heart, were joined for life?"

"Would you have answered me truly if I had?"

"Yes," she said, proudly; "and then I should have left you forever. Why do you humiliate me, Malpas? Beware, or you may find in me a woman who knows how to resent an insult, although I have sworn to honor and obey you."

His eyes quailed before her flashing glances, which were full of anger and contempt.

"You said I was the only man you ever loved, Olive."

"And you think I have deceived you?"

"I did not say so. My nature is such that I cannot bear even to think that any one but myself should ever have heard words of tenderness or affection from your lips."

"Great heavens!" she thought, "what have I done? Is this the man for whom I have forfeited my freedom?"

"You are silent," he said. "Oh, Olive, for give me! It is my love for you that makes me so exacting."

"It is a pity," she retorted, "that you did not speak your mind freely to me before things had gone so far. As for forgiveness, I shall be guided in my answer by your future conduct. Pray do not worry me further!"

He bit his lip and gazed out at the window in a most unhappy frame of mind, ardently wishing to become reconciled to his beautiful wife.

Olive, who had closed her eyes as if in weary abstraction, now opened them and gazed out at the country.

He was in a better frame of mind now, and seized the opportunity of saying something to her.

"What are you seeing out at your window, Olive?" he asked pleasantly.

"The same as you see at yours!" was the icy reply, made with coldly-averted head.

He again relapsed into silence and scanned the country, as if to find some help out of his difficulty; but there were only sheep grazing and the wind blowing, neither of which things offered a promising theme for conversation. In his perplexity he resolved upon a bold course of action. He had raised a demon of anger in her breast, and would try by tenderness and affection to quell it. He placed one arm around her, and gently drew her head toward him.

But Olive's heart was sore. He had offered no explanation of his conduct nor caressed her, nor said a loving word until now.

She struggled to free herself from his tardy embrace, but he held her only the tighter as he whispered passionately, "Let us not quarrel, my darling; but kiss me, and let us be friends!"

His lips pressed hers without response on her part.

He released her with a frown, for her face looked proud and angry, and her eyes had no love light in them.

He took his seat apart from her, and neither spoke a word as the train plunged on through the gray darkness, shaking and swinging as it went.

The end of their journey was reached at last and they were comfortably located next evening in the Grand Union Hotel, Saratoga. They had finished dinner and were sipping their coffee, which stood upon the table beside lovely flowers and graceful ferns, both silent and preoccupied.

Olive sat in a low arm-chair in an attitude of restfulness after fatigue. She held her cup in her lap, and a white blossom which she had just selected from the flowers on the table gleamed in her bosom. Her eyes watched him furtively as she thought:

"Why does he not deal frankly with me, and put an end to this unhappy misunderstanding?"

His eyes were fixed upon the grate, in which a bright fire burned, evidently in deep meditation.

"Malpas, will you take any more coffee?"

At the sound of her voice breaking the stillness of the quiet room, he started from his reverie, and said:

"No, thanks, Olive; shall I take your cup?"

After having performed this little service for her, he drew his chair close to hers, and said:

"Olive, if we have made a mistake, do not let us quarrel before the world, at least."

"Mistake, Malpas?" she said, somewhat haughtily; "if you think so, we do not need to make it worse. The less we see of each other the better."

Having said this, she swept from the room—not noisily nor roughly, she was too well-bred for that—and left him alone.

A little later he heard her voice in the passage, and throwing open the door he saw her maid with her traveling-bag, and she herself dressed as if to go out.

"Olive, what is the meaning of this?" he

asked, sternly. "I insist upon an explanation!"

"I am not comfortable here, and am going to change my room."

His blood was up, and he merely bowed and returned to the room, leaving her to carry out her purpose without even inquiring where she was going.

No sleep visited his eyes that night as he tossed restlessly to and fro, thinking of his lost Effie, and of her gentle, yielding ways, which certainly offered a striking contrast to Olive's unbending, proud spirit, who had lost no time in battling for her freedom, instead of trying, by loving wiles, to chase away his gloomy, suspicious thoughts.

He was up betimes next morning, and strolled out into the lawns which lay under the sunshine, while the dew sparkled like jewels among the grass and upon every tree and shrub.

Olive was sitting, gazing listlessly at the scene, a sad look on her lovely face, which was pale, as if no rest had visited her couch over night.

"You are out early this morning," he remarked carelessly.

"Yes; I enjoy the air at this time. And you?"—this inquiringly.

"Can find no rest away from you, Olive. You asked for an explanation of my strange question to you in the train; do you still wish for it?"

He was seated at her side now, looking greedily and longingly for one tender glance which would tell him he was forgiven.

"I should certainly like the enigma explained," this with a half imploring look at him.

"And you will not be angry with me, Olive, for my suspicions?"

"How can I say? Oh, Malpas, do not keep me in suspense; give me the opportunity of refuting any calumny that may have reached you!"

"Is that your photograph?" he asked, eagerly, producing the one which had been inclosed in Tolmache's letter.

Glancing at it, she answered shortly, "No."

"But it is wonderfully like you, Olive."

"It is my cousin's."

"And her name?"

"Olive Stahl—the same as my own; but she is dead."

"Thank heaven!" burst from his lips.

"What, for her death?"

"No; the discovery that this letter" (producing it) "is not true. I will not insult you by asking you to read it; and I humbly crave your forgiveness, my darling, for my unjust—nay, cruel—suspicions!" This as he tore the paper into shreds.

"You are forgiven, Malpas," she said; "but, oh! for both our sakes, do be careful. There can be no true love without confidence."

In his revulsion of feeling, from unhappiness to joy, he promised everything; but it remains for the sequel to show whether his reformation was complete.

CHAPTER X.

"BEWARE OF JEALOUSY."

SHORTLY after their reconciliation they left Saratoga for New York, and two days later were aboard the "Amerique," bound for Havre, where they arrived in due time.

His life was now all excitement, delirium, exhilaration—for did he not bask in the sunshine of her love, without a cloud to dim his happiness?

The lovely bride made a perfect *furor* in Paris, and everywhere she went was styled *La Circe Americaine*.

Upon the day of her first presentation at the Tuileries she wore a delicate primrose-colored satin, wrought and embroidered with seed pearls; the train of blue velvet was embroidered in gold.

Her hair was confined by a diamond comb. A splendid Brussels lace veil, surmounted by a coronet of brilliants, fell to her feet.

Diamond bracelets clasped her glorious arms,

and a necklet of the same rare gems encircled her throat.

As she passed up the hall of audience, leaning on the arm of one of the princes, a murmur of admiration ran through the rooms.

When she courtesied and retired all eyes followed her.

From that day her beauty, grace, and genius, her rare accomplishments and fine taste, became the theme of general conversation. Her portrait was painted by the first artist in France, and was hung in the gallery of the Louvre; and many whose position in society excluded them from her presence, resorted thither to look upon the picture of the celebrated beauty.

Her husband was at first proud of her brilliant success, of the admiration, the wonder her beauty excited.

His liberality and her extravagance knew no bounds.

The revenues of his estates for many years to come were sunk in the purchase of jewelry an empress might have envied.

But under the circumstances of their love and marriage, with a woman of Olive's ardent temperament and a man of Malpas Stanhope's severe code, this happy state of affairs could not last forever.

He saw her surrounded by the most brilliant men of the day, by courtiers of elegant address, the cynosure of the youth and the chivalry of France.

He saw one with form of exquisite grace and beauty, of royal lineage, ever by her side, and he hated the man as only a middle-aged husband could a youthful rival; and he thought, when it was too late, of the twenty-three years of disparity in their ages, and groaned. But he was only torturing himself causelessly, for Olive was devotedly attached to him, and received the homage of the first men in the empire as a natural tribute, as a matter of course, but with haughty indifference.

She worshiped her husband; her whole face would light up with a haughty, but adoring, audacious joy, as she turned her proud eyes from the admiring glances of some starred and gartered hero, to rest them upon the august form of Stanhope.

She knew and felt her power in society, and the latent element of haughty defiance began to develop itself in her character.

Though Malpas had obtained the dream of his life, yet he was wretched; there was a canker in his rose of joy—an aloe in his wine of love. The evil of his treacherous heart was beginning to interpret itself. He might have seen how exclusively she loved him; but when was jealousy ever reasonable? He only saw her wondrous beauty, her circle of worshipers. He only remembered her ardent nature, her many faults; his own forty-five years, his grave demeanor, as contrasted with the fresh beauty, the grace, and the princely rank of her youthful admirer.

The gathering storm broke forth at last. There was a royal *fete* given at the Tuileries; the glory of the court and camp were there. Olive, arrayed in all her beauty and fascinations, was present; and, of course, was the belle of the gorgeous *salon*.

She had chosen a costume for the occasion which could only be likened to sunbeam. Her dress was of fine, thin, light gold thread gauze over a rich satin of the hue of bright gold.

Her hair was dressed and looped with yellow topazes, and the same warm-hued jewels glowed upon the bosom, neck and arms.

And as she floated through the rooms in the mazes of the waltz, the prince followed her with his eyes, and thought her the personification of sunlight.

He watched her as she dismissed her partner with a wave of the hand, and then reclined on a couch in graceful lassitude, behind a gigantic palm tree.

He followed her to her retreat; he gained her side—fell at her feet; he raised her hand in passionate fervor to his lips; his eyes were lifted in silent adoration to her face.

She calmly and proudly withdrew her hand as she said: "The rooms are oppressively warm; will you give me your arm to the gardens, Malpas?"

The prince arose with surprise and disappointment, but kept his graceful self-possession, and turned to meet Malpas Stanhope.

"Doubtless his highness will render you that service, madam," he replied, turning upon his heel.

Stanhope turned away as his wife arose with graceful dignity and accepted the proffered arm of the prince.

The *fete* was over; it had been an evening of high triumph to the beauty. An empress and royal princess had graced the revels, yet she had been the real queen of the brilliant assemblage.

Augustine, Olive's maid, was untwining from her glossy tresses the topazes that had bound them.

The door opened, and Malpas entered his wife's dressing-room.

He walked up to her, and stood with folded arms and moody brow, contemplating in silence her dangerous beauty.

At last he said, in deep, cold tones: "Send your maid away, Olive; I want a few words with you alone."

With a presentiment of what was coming, she answered coolly, "I have not done with her yet."

"Dismiss your attendant at once, madam; or you will oblige me to do it for you!" he said, sternly.

"Permit me, my lady, to retire?" the woman pleaded, in some embarrassment.

Olive arose, and with quiet dignity remarked: "We will give you up the possession of this room, Mr. Stanhope, since your convenience and pleasure seem to require it. Augustine, precede me to my bed-chamber."

"Not so, fair Olive: you do not leave this room yet!"

She passed on, unheeding him. He stepped after her, took her hand, and led her back to her chair.

Too proud to resist, she gracefully yielded, and seating herself inquired: "Do you like this apartment better than any other, that you thus intrude upon my privacy, Mr. Stanhope?"

Her words fell empty on his ears; he was thinking of her conduct, as, with downcast head and measured steps, he paced slowly to and fro.

"He thinks to mold me to his wishes; to terrify and intimidate one who, like myself, would not barter her freedom for a crown!" she thought. "If to triumph, to excel, to bring princes to my feet, is a crime, then have I offended mightily!"

Malpas Stanhope could not have selected a worse time for taking his wife to task than the present.

She was intoxicated by the adulation which she had received, and although she loved him dearly and truly, and had not a thought astray from him, she would not submit to his assuming the role of a jealous husband. There was a lurking spirit of mischief in her eyes, a disposition to brave his wrath rather than to ward it off by any display of tenderness.

How she watched him, as he paced uneasily to and fro, fearful to cause the clouds of his anger to burst over her devoted head.

His very calmness incensed her. Why did he not rave, upbraid her, insult her, rather than exasperate her by his silence? At last, his pent-up feelings found a vent, but not in an ebullition of temper.

Seating himself near her, he said, "Olive, you cannot be ignorant of the source of my displeasure. Were I a less prominent figure in society, I should not feel my position so acutely!"

"Oh, indeed, how very trying, to be sure!"

He frowned, but continued his argument: "I can make every allowance for your finding yourself in an unaccustomed position, in which you are flattered to the top of your bent by

the unmeaning words of brainless votaries of pleasure, but still I—"

"Hold!" she said, haughtily; "you insinuate more than you can substantiate. My parents were as good as yours, and I did not require to wed with such as you to raise myself in the social scale."

"Mere assumption," he said, with a wave of his hand. "When I first became acquainted with you, I believe you were not in such an exalted position, madam!"

"That I have a vestige of respectability left is owing to my own rectitude, and not to your forbearance!"

The shaft went home, but only rankled in his breast.

"I am not speaking so much of your position as of your conduct," he replied. "As my wife, I expect, nay, demand, that you should consider my feelings, and not provoke the comments of society."

"This is charming!" she said, with a covert sneer. "Did I crave the honor of an alliance with you? Your memory must be very treacherous. You ought not to assume the character of Bluebeard, or you may meet with his fate."

"Really you do not seem to be aware of the term they apply to you, madam!" he replied, in accents of withering scorn.

"Thanks, I do, and feel flattered. They style me, '*La Circe Americaine*.' Appreciative, isn't it?"

"And my wife can say this—can even take a pride in the title! No lady holding your place would be flattered by it! Perhaps they will cudgel their poor brains for another equivocal term!"

"We won't discuss it," she said, flippantly; "you are not in the Senate now. What a pity! You might then meet with an 'obstructionist,' and not be permitted to carry everything before you."

"Insolent—intolerable!"

"You don't seem to care about the truth, so I will change the subject to one more congenial to me—that of dress. You like my last costume, I presume—it was much admired?"

"It, like your conduct, was very questionable; but, of course, I, with my old-fashioned notions of propriety, would not be considered a judge."

"I should think not," she said, with a saucy laugh. "I am devising a new costume; shall I tell you what it is to be? But perhaps I had better not, or you might veto it."

"The prince would be a better judge, no doubt. I am no trifler, no do I live for pleasure alone; but I would advise you not to exasperate me beyond endurance. A good lover can prove an equally good hater."

"For which piece of information," she said, with a graceful inclination of the head, "I suppose I ought to feel and do feel devoutly thankful."

"As you ought to be thankful that I should be anxious for the honor of my house."

"The honor of your house!" she exclaimed, scornfully.

At last, putting a curb upon his resentment, he seated himself beside her. Taking her hand he warned her of the pitfalls and dangers that surrounded her. But the spirit of perversity and wantonness now reigned in her heart, and she cut short his eloquence with a gay laugh. His brow flushed.

"What do you mean by that, madam?"

"Why, it is so amusing to hear you turn moralizer!"

Again her silvery laugh rung out, and he began to lose all command of himself, and shouted, angrily, "Leave the room this instant, Mrs. Stanhope!"

"When I please, sir! I stayed here for your pleasure; I remain now for my own. If you have the bad taste to weary of my society you had better retire yourself!"

"What do you mean by this insolent conduct, madam?"

"That you might have spared your wife a lecture upon modesty, discretion and fidelity.

Pardon me; it is too amusing! But you need not fear for my chastity, Mr. Stanhope. My pride, if no better motive, will keep my honor bright."

"Your pride, as you term it, has not heretofore sustained you, madam, and I feel constrained to remind you that a woman whose passion has once betrayed her principles is not secure from a second error! I speak this in warning, not in reproach."

She started up; looked at him keenly; sunk down in her seat again. The blood rushed to her face, and, retreating, left it pale as marble. She had not believed him capable of wounding her thus.

At last she screamed between her clinched teeth: "Oh, merciful Heaven, how I detest and loathe myself for ever having loved this traitor—this dastard!"

"Dastard!"—the most provoking, the most exasperating word a man can hear from a woman's lips—maddened him, as he replied:

"Loathe yourself as I now loathe you for having loved, not the man, but his wealth, and for having repaid, benefits with ingratitude, trust with treachery, and loathe yourself as I do for having betrayed the confidence of your best friend and benefactress—my angel wife, Effie!"

It was now her turn to start from her seat, and she stood before him trembling with rage, like a caged lioness.

"And who led me into this? oh, coward and traitor! I was a young, unsophisticated girl, you a 'potent, grave and reverend seignior'—Heaven save the mark!—a 'pillar in the State,' and I an unwary girl whom you should have respected and guided, not led into error! You say that *my* passion had betrayed my principles. Why not add *our* passion? Recollect yourself, Malpas Stanhope; turn your thoughts to the past! Had it not been for my steadfastness, where, in Heaven's name, should I have been now? Your principles, indeed! It was mine that saved us from the worst of crimes!"

"It did not suit your ambitious views," he hissed into her ears, "to be the mistress of a man whose wife you eventually might become!"

His last taunt stung her to madness, and her very lips were quivering, cold and white with the passion that convulsed her, as she replied: "Let me confront you with a truth that I wish may annihilate you, and tell you I love the prince—the man whose brow at two-and-twenty is wreathed with more laurels than will deck yours at eighty! I adore him! Does that strike home? Even as you, in Effie's lifetime, oblivious of your marriage vows, loved me, so I have given my heart to this king of men! Does that thrill you? Now do your worst! Divorce me! Divorced women have filled thrones before now, and he loves me—nay, worships the very ground I tread on!"

This was the climax of her torrid nature, and the raving of insanity. She tore off, and cast upon the floor, necklace, bracelets, rings, as she passed toward the door, her figure swaying like a reed blown by a violent storm. Her fingers twisted in her beautiful tresses, which she tore out by the roots and cast behind her. So she left the room.

When she had disappeared, with one of those strange reactions of tenderness in jealousy, he stooped and gathered up the torn tresses, and smoothing them tenderly, pressed them to his brow, his lips, inhaling their perfume, and opening his vest, laid them next his heart.

He now regretted that he had reproached her so bitterly, for he was sure that had she felt the faintest interest in the prince it would have been the very last thing she would have confessed to.

Wildly, recklessly, Olive passed on to her bed-chamber, and threw herself, all richly arrayed as she was, upon the bed.

Augustine approached her, saying, "Oh, miladi, de beautiful dress; it vill all ruin! S'all I get your robes de chambre?"

With a haggard look, and an adjuring gesture she sent her from the room.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW SWEET IS FORGIVENESS!

OLIVE remained extended upon her bed, her cold hands clasped and pressed upon her burning brow, a weight like that of Atlas oppressing her chest to suffocation. She lay infolded in the coils of anger, grief, remorse, which, like a serpent, struck its fangs into her heart. The happy subjects of a first passionate love delude themselves with the sweet belief that their joy is immortal.

True, they have heard, and read, and seen that the ecstasy of other lovers subsides, but they never dream that such can be the case with them; the very intensity of their happiness, the excess that must accelerate its decline and death, but confirms their faith in its immortality. But it is a fallacy, a bright delusion, whose vanishing, faded blossoms leave the very soul dark for awhile.

Upon the whole, night lasts no longer than day, and so it is with lovers' quarrels; quick to feel anger, doubt and jealousy, all vanishes after a day or two, when they come face to face with the object of their affection, and all boundaries of pride are trampled under foot by a returning and overmastering tenderness.

The thunder and lightning of passion cease, and a soft rain, bright with the rays of the sun that is trying to break through, is descending. No matter how much the dignity of the man, or the delicacy of the woman, has been outraged, all is forgotten.

Human passion, like the day, has its dawn, its meridian glory, and its decline; like the year, has its spring, summer, autumn and winter; like the sea, has its flow and ebb; like the sky, has its sunshine and its clouds; like man, has its birth, life and death.

Olive was not one to remain long in any sort of pain without seeking relief. Half rising, she reached and pulled the bell-rope.

Her maid entered.

"Darkness; I want darkness!"

Augustine closed the blinds; but this failed to relieve her.

She touched the bell again; the woman re-entered.

"Opium!"

Augustine left the room and soon returned with the desired narcotic. Olive swallowed it at a draught and fell back, overpowered by the influence of the drug.

It was near the dawn of day when Olive had thrown herself down in despair, seeking to dull the aching of her heart with opium. It was near the noon when her husband sought her chamber.

The room was closed, the windows were down, and the sun was shining through the crimson and lace curtains, and there she lay upon the bed in her disordered costly gold tissue and satin robes, one arm and her hair wildly thrown over the pillow, with pale and haggard face and parched lips.

He stood looking moodily at her; then summoning her maid, he directed her to open the windows to admit air, and to have a bath prepared for her lady, by the time she awoke.

It was late in the afternoon when she aroused from her deep slumber, with a dull, vague feeling of grief and remorse, for which she could not at first account. Seeing her maid sitting by the side of her, she inquired for her husband.

"What o'clock is it?"

"Five, madam."

Indifferently, almost stupidly, she resigned herself to the hands of her maid, and after a bath and a cup of coffee, felt somewhat restored in spirits. She suffered Augustine to robe her in a *neglige* toilet, and giving directions that no one should be admitted, she passed to her boudoir, sunk into a lounging chair, and gave herself up entirely to dumb grief and despair.

Augustine was looking at her, and, with more kindness than discretion, ventured an attempt at comfort, and said: "It will all blow over, miladi—believe me, it will; if you had only seen monsieur this morning, you—"

But she was interrupted by her ladyship's eyes, which were fixed upon her in haughty surprise. She bade her be quiet and leave the room. She sat alone in stony silence, too heartbroken to weep, expecting every footfall to be that of her husband, till the night deepened, and Augustine entered the boudoir with a tray of tea, some delicate cutlets, and delicious fruit.

Presently she ventured a remark to her lady, and said: "Miladi, even if you were to give me notice, I cannot help speaking my mind. I will not let you be here. You shall take de refreshment; I vill not be refused; for just t'ink if you go to de palace to-morrow, looking pale and ill, dey vill lay de whole blame on your dressing-maid; dey will say I do not comprehend me business, and no lady shall give any more engagement." Going up coaxingly to Olive with delicious peaches, and a rusk, and a fragrant cup of tea, she added: "You shall eat dis peach, dear ladi; you vill look so faded if you do not eat; your eyes vill dim, your cheeks vill fall in, and your lips vill get white!"

Olive was at last persuaded by the importunity of Augustine; besides, she had a wholesome dread of becoming in any way wan or faded-looking. But she partook of the viands in a mechanical way only, while her woman chattered on volubly.

"Vy, miladi," she added, as Olive sipped her tea, and nibbled her peach, "you are de talk of Paris for your beauty, and dey say that you are the best dressed ladi in the capital, and I have been thinking you would make my fortune; that ven I left your service I might command one large salary, as the best *artiste de toilette* in Paris; but now, dearest miladi, you are trying to ruin your complexion vid opium, and your eyes vid weeping, and ruin me too from my fortune. Besides, dear ladi, der is not vonè of de men, not even de best, de very emperor himself, worth growing ugly for."

Olive had not distinguished one word of this strange exhortation, but she half-unconsciously yielded to the impulse given her; she arose, and suffered herself to be led to her room, and, seated on her lounge, permitted Augustine to sponge her face, hands and eyes with eau de Cologne, and prepare her for a grand fancy ball which "Mr. and Mrs. Stanhope" had promised to attend; and she determined, feeling somewhat refreshed from her light repast, to keep her engagement.

And she thought to herself, "I shall meet him there, and then we shall ride back together in the carriage, and all will be made up."

Augustine robed her mistress in a magnificent sultana's dress. The carriage was ordered, and soon stood in readiness at the door.

When she was dressed she ran into her husband's chamber, with the faint hope that she might find him, perhaps, preparing to dress for the ball, and that her bright and radiant presence would influence him to take her in his arms and imprint a fond kiss of admiration, love, and forgiveness upon her willing lips.

She ran into his room, looked in every nook and cranny—as if she expected to find him lurking in the corners—and then, with a shade of disappointment on her beautiful face, she searched every room, but to no purpose.

At last, giving up the search, she donned her black velvet mask, and entering her carriage, she was driven toward Versailles.

The grand festival was at its height when she arrived, and the company had already laid aside their masks. It was not many minutes, therefore, before she was discovered by her great admirer, the prince, who, approaching her, said: "Why have you kept the sun of your presence from our yearning eyes, lady mine?"

Without noticing his hidden flattery, Olive said: "I will tax your kindness, your highness, to inform me if you have seen my husband in the rooms?"

"He is not here, dear madam," the prince

replied; "he left about an hour ago. But surely you will grant me the honor of your hand for the next dance?"

"Indeed, I cannot comply with your request to-night. I must return at once to my hotel."

"You surely will not take away the light of your presence, and cause the eclipse of the sun of beauty to-night?"

"Indeed—indeed, you must excuse me," she replied with a quivering lips; "I—I am far from well."

And the prince, feeling at the moment chagrined, shrugged his shoulders with disappointment as, at her urgent request, he led her through the *salons*; down the palatial staircase, lined with its tropical shrubs and exotics, to her carriage.

In a few minutes Olive was being driven back to the hotel.

It was near the dawn of day when she arrived.

"Where is Mr. Stanhope?" she inquired of the porter.

"I believe he has retired to rest, madame," the man returned.

Hastening up the staircase she sought her own chamber, where she found Augustine dozing in a chair, awaiting her return.

Shaking the woman roughly from her slumber, she asked, "Where is your master?"

Rubbing her eyes, and looking scared at the unceremonious awakening from a beautiful dream, Augustine replied in a confused tone, "He is not vere I know."

"What are you talking about?" inquired Olive, in an angry voice. "You sleepy creature, I asked you where Mr. Stanhope is to be found."

"And asking your pardon, miladi, I vill say I do not know his vereabouts; but I think he is shut and fastened up in the inside of his door in his writing-room, vere I did hear such mutterings, and oh! the Blessed Virgin!" she added, clasping her hands, "such vords of orfulness as vould turn a cat's back from gray to vite."

The Frenchwoman was in a fog as to what she was saying or doing; she had evidently imbibed a little *eau de vie* while waiting for the return of her lady.

"How dare you go prying and listening at the door of Mr. Stanhope?" Olive exclaimed petulantly. "I would not take such a liberty even myself."

"Oh, miladi, it was not all outside de door dat I did hear monsieur swear such big vords. He did rave up and down dis very room upon the vickedness of all women, especially you, and he did frighted me so much dat my very hair did stand out like one 'edgehog's spikes, and I vas so upset I nearly did fall into a faint, and now I believe it vill all end in one fit of de sulks. It's de vay wid dem all; I have seen so many of dem."

"For Heaven's sake, hush!" at last Olive cried, "and take off this wretched finery."

With deft fingers she soon unrobed her mistress, and then quietly left the chamber.

Poor Olive was thoroughly subdued, weary, worn-out and broken down. Grieved love does make such babies of us all.

Exhausted with bodily fatigue and mental anxiety, she sunk into a deep sleep, from which she awoke late in the day, refreshed.

After her bath and breakfast, she ventured to ask if her husband was in the hotel, but was informed that he had left an hour before.

That night she attended the opera, feeling assured in her heart that she would meet Malpas there; but she was doomed again to be disappointed, and feeling sick at heart she returned home, with the hope, at least, that he would be there waiting for her, and said to a servant on entering her drawing-room, "Let Mr. Stanhope know at once that I am at home."

"His excellency has not returned yet, miladi." She suppressed a rising groan, and hurried into her chamber to await him.

Upon the morning succeeding their quarrel,

Stanhope went to a diplomatic dinner. Immediately after coffee was served, he arose and took his leave, and hurried back in much anxiety to his hotel, and on his way made a solemn resolve that nothing on earth should induce him to spend another such unholy and miserable night.

Passing up immediately to their rooms, he found them vacant. He then sought her in the *salon*—in vain.

He rung the bell, and on its being answered by a servant, he said, "Go tell Mrs. Stanhope's maid to let her lady know, wherever she is, that I have returned, and am waiting for her here."

"*Oui, monsieur; mais madame a alle a la bal masque a Versailles.*"

"Heartless!" thought Stanhope, as the man bowed out of the room—"heartless! More—impertinent, after all I told her! You shall repent this, my lady!"

Disappointed and angry, he passed the night alone in his own chamber. It did not happen to occur to him that probably she had gone to Versailles to seek his presence. A quarrel is very properly called a misunderstanding, and certainly misconception has the most to do with beginning and perpetuating a feud.

As soon as he had arisen the next morning, a messenger arrived with a letter which required his instant presence at Versailles upon business of urgent importance. The moment it was completed he drove rapidly back, and on inquiring for his wife, the answer was, "She had just gone to the opera."

His heart at last was hardening toward her, and he exclaimed, vehemently, as he walked up and down his study, "She does this purposely; she defies me! She must learn a better lesson! Effie would never have dared to treat me like this!"

And he began to devise means to bring her to her senses, to humble her, to bring her to his feet, and to his heart too, though he would not acknowledge it.

In the mean time, Olive returned home, and exchanged her heavy velvet robe, her gems and pumes for a lovely dressing-robe of Indian muslin. Feeling somewhat fatigued, she fell into a calm sleep, from which she was aroused by Augustine, who stood over her mistress, fanning her, with the object of awakening her.

"I have taken de liberty to awaken you from your good sleep because I thought you would be glad to know the master has returned and is in his dressing-room."

Olive started up toward the door, saying, "I will see him! He shall not treat me like this!"

And the tears began to well in those lustrous eyes.

Augustine caught her mistress by her arm, and said:

"You surely vill not be so mad, miladi, as to go before him with those red eyes? Nothing could look worse than dat! I will bathe dem!"

With an imperious wave of her hand, which compelled obedience from the fussy Frenchwoman, she rushed out of the room and gained the door. But it was closed. She tried the lock, but it was fastened on the inside. And then, overwrought by the suspense and torture she had endured, she sunk down at the door and wept—that haughty woman—like a heart-broken child!

Malpas lay upon his couch, racked with anxiety and remorse at his cruelty and unmanliness. Her loved image haunted him, not as she stood before him in her dressing room, her form erect, her lips writhing and eyes flashing with pride and scorn as she defied him, but as she lay upon her bed all disordered and disheveled, in heavy and deathlike sleep, procured by opium, with the beautiful hair he loved so well all untangled about her!

He wished to return and tell her that she was forgiven, and to kiss away the shadow from her brow, to smooth the bright hair back into its lovely waves.

He felt by inspiration that she also yearned for a reconciliation.

With the intention of seeking Olive in her chamber, he opened the door hurriedly, and there, to his surprise, he saw his beautiful wife lying across the threshold. With an exclamation of terror—for he feared she had fainted—he stooped to raise her.

But she raised herself, and, clinging to him for support, he felt the thrilling clasp of the soft arms he loved so well around him, and the rippling music of Olive's voice, saying:

"Don't go, Malpas—don't go, dear husband, for indeed I can bear this no longer! What is this estrangement between us! Words, angry words are but fevered breath. Forget them, dearest husband. Oh, I have been so wretched!—and you, Malpas, how do you feel?"

She had gently drawn him around and was facing him, bending forward, leaning her hands upon his folded arms, and, gazing anxiously, imploringly up into his countenance, said:

"I wish my tongue had been palsied before it gave you such cause for offense! Oh, Malpas, if you knew what it cost my pride to say this!"

At last he caught her in his embrace, his arms tightened around her waist, as he replied:

"My beautiful, my darling wife, we both have need for forgiveness, for I was most to blame, and I deeply regret my unmanly, cowardly conduct. Say, darling Olive, you were not happy while our hearts were separated, were you?"

"No, Malpas!" she replied, while the tears were fast gathering in her beautiful eyes. "I never knew how much I loved until I thought I had lost your love and affection."

"Climes of the warmest seasons, darling," he said, as his clasp tightened, "have the most thunder and lightning."

And there she sat, her glowing arms around his neck, her face pressed upon his bosom with a force as if she would take root there.

"Why was I so mad as to say things that—" He stopped her further utterance with a shower of kisses, saying:

"I have forgotten them all, dearest wife!—my beautiful one!—my Olive!"

They were happy, their reconciliation was complete for the time.

CHAPTER XII.

A BEAUTIFUL DEMON.

A TWELVEMONTH has passed since the marriage of Olive, and they have returned from Paris and taken up their abode for good at Rosemount.

But a new phase of character had manifested itself in Olive, and that was an overwhelming feeling of jealousy, which caused many upbraidings and misunderstandings.

She was even jealous of Little Bluebell.

Maude Gordon was a constant visitor and friend; for she dearly loved Effie's little child, and tried, in her womanly, tender way, to soften the discord and to brighten up the life of the motherless Olive.

She had a little one of her own—a dear little fellow, with sunny blue eyes, the image of her handsome Saxon husband—and her chief delight was to sit with her little Cyril cooing in her arms, singing snatches of baby songs, and telling wondrous fairy stories to Bluebell, who in return loved her with a passionate yearning amounting to adoration.

And when the child was alone she would often steal into the library, her father's favorite room. He would raise her upon his knees, and she would place her little arms around his neck, nestle her sunny head upon his bosom, and sink to sleep in childlike contentment and peace.

At this time his wife began to distrust him—nay, more, she suspected him. She had been confined to her room with a severe illness, and Maude Gordon had been a ministering angel in her devotion and care of the invalid.

But Olive let the canker-worm of jealousy absorb her whole soul. She believed her hus-

band guilty of a mad passion for her friend Maude. One afternoon Olive entered the nursery unexpectedly.

Maude was occupied in guiding Bluebell's hand on a drawing-slate. The sketch in hand was the face of Mr. Stanhope, who was leaning over Maude's shoulder, laughing at the caricature that was developing itself under the hands of Maude and little Olive.

Had a bomb-shell fallen into the room the effect could not have been greater.

Olive's face grew paler, whiter than marble; her lips parted from her set teeth; her eyes glittered; her brow was black as night, as she walked up to Maude Gordon, and said, in a husky tone:

"Shameless hussy! leave my house this instant!"

Mrs. Gordon turned round and confronted the infuriated woman, and replied, "I can only attribute this unladylike conduct to some temporary insanity. You must be mad!" and instantly left the room. Her husband approached her, demanding the reason of her conduct.

"I insist upon knowing what is all this!" he said, angrily.

But she sprung away from him with a sudden bound, and exclaimed, "Don't touch me!"

"Don't touch you! Are you mad, Olive? I really do believe you are!"

Again he approached her, but she darted out of his reach and gained his dressing-room, where a loaded revolver always lay on the toilet-table, and turning upon him, she shrieked, "If you dare to touch me, or even approach me, I'll kill you!"

And now he really did believe her bereft of her senses, as he contemplated the beautiful fury.

"Put down that weapon!" he said, sternly.

"Are you afraid of it?" she sneered.

"Give it me at once, Olive."

"Stand off and hear me, Malpas Stanhope! I have loved you better than, Heaven knows, my own soul! I knew no law, human or divine, above this law of love. Had you grown old, and been steeped in poverty, crime, and shame to the lips, I should have clung to you still, as long as my life lasted, *provided that you had been true to me!* You have outraged me, and I might have expected it, and may I die a thousand deaths the day I suffer you to approach me again as a husband!"

"I should feel infinitely obliged to you," he replied, "if you would kindly inform me as to the nature of my offense, for I pledge you my word that I have not the slightest clew to your meaning."

In a voice of concentrated rage, her eyes gleaming with hatred and mad frenzy, she exclaimed, "Do you think I am blind to the mad intimation that possesses you for that woman?"

"Hold!" he cried, in a tone of excitement. "How dare you—"

But at that moment she was beyond all human control. She raised the weapon. He attempted to wrest it from her. But too late, the Beautiful Demon—for such she was—held it too firmly in her grasp. She fired! He recoiled, staggered, and sunk upon the ground, and the blood flowed copiously from his right temple.

She dropped the revolver, and, falling upon his prostrate body, stanching the blood with her garments.

She had come to her senses at last!

A frightful stillness reigned in the chamber, and then piercing shrieks filled the house that reached the ears of the alarmed domestics. They came rushing into the room madly, and looking like a herd of terrified deer, as they saw the prostrate form of their master clasped in the embrace of the wretched woman.

Medical aid was quickly in attendance; but, alas! Malpas Stanhope had but a few hours to live.

Consciousness returned to the wounded man, and he whispered almost inarticulately for his friend, Danton Digby, who was a judge, and

whose place adjoined Rosemount, to be sent for immediately.

His commands were obeyed, and in a very short time Judge Digby was by his side.

The dying man whispered to his wife to come near; and, holding her hand in a loving clasp, he said to Danton:

"I have sent for you as a magistrate, to tell you that, believing I am a dying man, I earnestly believe that Olive Stanhope, my wife, was innocent of any intent to take my life; it was purely an accident. I wish to give my signature to that effect."

In a few minutes the necessary document was completed by the judge, and signed by the dying man.

The excitement and effort proved too much, and he sunk exhausted; and the gray, clammy dews of the death-angel began to overspread his brow and lips; motioning Olive to bend toward him, he clasped her on that bosom that had sheltered her with its strength and love and whispered:

"My own! my darling! my wife! I forgive you!"

As the words lingered on his lips, his spirit fled. Olive knelt with her stately head bowed, her limbs prone upon the floor, murmuring:

"My darling husband! Heaven help me, I am his murderess!"

And she fell senseless to the ground.

CHAPTER XIII.

NOT GUILTY.

The funeral arrangements were carried out entirely by Cyril Gordon. Olive, being stricken with brain fever, lay tossing wildly upon her widowed bed, calling that loved name which would never answer in response again.

There she lay, a wreck, a shadow of her former beautiful self; her hair shorn close to her head, her eyes bloodshot, her face distorted, lovingly tended by the woman whom she had so cruelly misjudged.

The only voice that seemed to bring reason to that clouded brain was that of little Bluebell, his child.

Fits of gleams of reason would issue from those faded eyes, and calmness would steal over that troubled soul, as the child would prattle, and, pointing above, speak of her lost father and mother, and coaxingly whisper in Olive's ear:

"Oh, dear mamma! my dear new mamma, do not leave little Bluebell like my papa and other mamma! If you must go, take little Bluebell with you."

And so the child would chatter and talk day after day, and at last, to the unspeakable joy of Maude and her husband, Olive was restored to reason and to life, but to trouble of the direst kind from a source which they little dreamed of.

Colonel Stanhope, the father of Malpas, was telegraphed for upon the death of his son; but he was traveling from place to place, and his letters and telegrams did not reach him until after the funeral.

Perfectly unaware of the sorrow that had befallen him, he arrived at his town house to learn the sad intelligence that his beloved and only son was consigned to the tomb.

Hastening with all speed to Rosemount, he found his daughter-in-law unable to give him any particulars concerning Stanhope's death, as she was stricken down, and lay battling a grim fight for reason and life with the king of terrors.

In her delirium she went over the last sad scene repeatedly and the part she had taken in it, and denounced herself constantly, to the horror of her friend, Maude Gordon, as her husband's murderess. And the colonel stood by her couch and listened with a firm, set determination to unravel the mystery of his son's untimely death.

He set most diligent inquiries afoot in every quarter as to the cause of his son's sudden demise. The only answer he received was that Stanhope and his wife had quarreled, and a

revolver accidentally went off and wounded him fatally.

He was just on the point of giving up all thoughts of finding out the truth, when a revelation was made to him by a woman whom Olive had taken into her service in the place of Augustine, who wished to return to her beloved France.

The woman was of the same nationality as her mistress, a Cuban, and bore Olive a feeling of revenge and spite for being sternly reprimanded and threatened with notice to leave about a week before the fatal quarrel. She determined to bide her time and have her revenge. The moment at last arrived in the shape of Colonel Stanhope, to whom she determined to tell her secret.

One day he left Olive's chamber perfectly amazed at her ravings and their fearful import, and yet he could not bring himself to believe that they were true, when he was accosted by this woman who followed him out of the room.

"I wish to speak to you, sir."

"Speak on, my good woman."

"But what I have to say it will not do to say here on this staircase," she replied. "It is for your ears alone."

"Very well, my good woman; we will step in here."

And closing the door of a small ante-room, she said: "I am in great trouble; my conscience is at war with me, and I feel I cannot be happy till I unburden myself."

He now seemed interested, and said, "Make haste—be brief! Is it anything to do with the death of your late master? I cannot bear suspense! Say what you have to say quickly!"

The treacherous woman, with gleaming eyes, and yet with the pretended air of mock sorrow at her overburdened conscience, said: "I was in the ante-room next to my master's dressing-room, and know everything that passed the day he died. I heard their quarrel; I saw her snatch up the pistol and aim at him."

"What, woman, are you saying?" the colonel exclaimed, as he grasped her arm, violently.

"I am saying the truth," she said, spitefully, as she tried to disengage his hold from herself. "I say I saw her kill him!"

"Will you swear that?"

"Yes," she said, undauntedly, "before a thousand judges!"

"Enough!" and the colonel resolved to avenge his son.

When Olive returned to reason and consciousness she was waited upon by two emissaries of the police, and was conducted to a country jail, and there consigned to a wretched cell, emaciated, with but a faint resemblance left of the beautiful and proud Olive.

Colonel Stanhope's heart seemed turned to stone; no pleadings or reasonings of Gordon or his wife could alter his fell purpose, which was that his son's murderess should receive the doom that he felt she so well deserved.

And there she sat—with a placid, even exalted countenance, such as a martyr might wear when such a one had learned "to suffer and be strong"—in the wretched little apartment. She did not even sigh. It seemed as if the breath must have frozen upon her cold lips, she seemed so utterly chilled, body and soul.

She had been an inmate of the prison for two days, awaiting the examination before the magistrates, and nothing had passed her lips but a dry crust and some water.

Her haggard looks arrested even the attention of the officer who acted as turnkey, and approaching Olive deferentially, he said, "You are worn out, madam, for want of food. Is there anything that I could procure you that you could fancy?"

"No, thank you; I am not in want of anything at present," she replied, in a grateful tone.

"Come now," said the officer cheerfully; "remember what you have to pass through. Do take my advice, and try and keep up your strength; you have a trying time before you

when brought before the bench, and need all your nerve and courage to face the ordeal. You must have some wine and a good mutton-chop."

"Yes," she said, meekly, "you are right; I shall want strength. I will have anything you think fit to give me."

Just as the kind-hearted man was leaving the cell, Maude, in company with the superintendent, passed along the corridor, and came face to face with him.

At the presentation of a permit he returned and opened the door of the prisoner's cell; and to the inexpressible joy of Olive she was clasped in her friend's arms, while tears of sympathy rained from the eyes of Maude as she contemplated the thin, delicate face, with its dark rims round the eyes, speaking of long nights' vigils and pent-up suffering; those quivering lips, that had always been wreathed with smiles, that tried to be firm and not show their suffering, lent a charm to her, a nobleness that never in her brightest days could have appeared so irresistibly as it did now to Maude Gordon for loving sympathy.

Their conversation was long and earnest, and Maude communicated all the strenuous efforts that were being made to meet the dreadful charge; and told of the great advocates, Judge Valentine and lawyer Reginald Seymour, that had been retained on her behalf, and of her own firm belief that all would yet be well.

And then, the time of her visit being up, she left her friend, more happy and contented than she had been since she entered the dingy walls of that wretched place.

That evening Olive took refreshment, and almost enjoyed it, to the great satisfaction of the turnkey.

Next morning she was sitting absorbed in thought, as she was writing a letter to her solicitor, and did not notice that the door of the cell had been opened, till a soft, sweet voice called "Mamma, mamma!" and she turned, radiant with joyous surprise, as little Bluebell rushed eagerly forward.

She held forth her trembling arms to receive the child, smiling through her tears as if an angel had called.

"My dear mamma, I am so glad I found you! At first I did not know it was you, this nasty place is so dark. Why are you here?" she added, as she smothered her with kisses.

And in that dim light it was a beautiful sight to see those two lovely faces, with their angelic expression, speaking of love and perfect trust.

"Who brought you here, my darling?" Olive asked.

"Mrs. Gordon, mamma."

"Where is she, Bluebell, dear?"

"With grandpa."

"Is grandpa here then?"

"Yes, mamma, I saw him; he kissed me, and then Mrs. Gordon brought me to the door and told me to come in, and the big man said I might; and I was to give you her love and tell you that she was going to talk to grandpa. Why is grandpa so cross, mamma?"

"Cross, Bluebell, pet, did you say?" Olive asked, in a far-away tone.

"Yes, mamma, he was very cross. He called you a nasty name. I don't like him! I won't love him! You will let me stay with you, won't you?"

"No," she said, as she stroked the beautiful golden curls, "I cannot let your innocent head lie in such a pestilential place as this!"

"Oh, mamma, do not send me away from you!" she pleaded, as big tears rolled down on to the hands of Olive.

"Well, my darling, we shall see," she said, soothingly.

But when the shades of evening darkened o'er the gloomy grating of the little desolate room, Olive did not wish to part with little Bluebell, and the child clung to her with such tenacity and begged so imploringly to remain, that at last she consented, and gained the superintendent's permission.

And there the sweet, innocent child lay, with her delicately-veined temples pressing

that coarse prison pillow softly and trustfully as if it had been fragrant with rose-leaves; and when Olive would wake from some fitful dream, it was joy to feel the sweet breath of his child floating over her face, and her soft arms clinging to her neck.

She seemed like a cherub from heaven come to cheer her in her hours of sorrow and darkness.

It would have made a beautiful sight for a painter, those two calm, lovely faces pillowed together upon that prison bed.

Smiles wreathed the rosy lips of Bluebell, upon which the breath floated like mist upon a cluster of ripe cherries.

It was a picture of innocent sleep those dark walls of guilt had never sheltered before since their foundation.

When Olive and Bluebell awoke in the morning, she lovingly bathed and dressed the child; and fresh and rosy from her refreshing night's rest, with her rippling hair hanging like a cloud of gold around her shoulders, Bluebell knelt by the side of that wretched pallet, and prayed the simple little prayer that her mother had taught her.

As she was so engaged, the turnkey opened the door, and stood awe-inspired, reverently breathless, for fear he should interrupt the gentle pleadings of that pure, bright soul, as yet untouched, unsullied by a breath of worldliness.

He had a tray in his hand, with some rolls, eggs, and coffee; and tears coursed down his rugged cheeks as he placed it on the rude table, and thought of his own little ones at home, and of how truly the old adage was exemplified—"One touch of nature makes the whole world kin."

The day arrived at last when Olive Stanhope had to appear in a court-room crowded with spectators to answer the grave charge of murder. A thrill of sympathy passed through the crowd as she stood perfectly calm in front of the public gaze.

There was not a person present, even to the officers of the court, that did not exhibit some sign of sympathy for the prisoner.

When questioned by the solicitor, she spoke low, and faltered a little now and then; but the tones of her voice were so sadly sweet, the tears seemed so close to her eyes without reaching them, that even the magistrates leaned forward to catch her words rather than break them by a request that she should speak louder.

Maude and Mr. Gordon were near her, and ever and anon sent her glances and smiles of hope and encouragement.

Amid a breathless silence the Cuban woman entered the witness-box, the only accuser against the prisoner; for Judge Digby was there, armed with his document, and many of the coroner's jury who had been on the inquest.

The woman was subjected to a severe cross-examination, which soon elicited her spite and malice; and when her evidence was given, a middle-aged woman stepped into the witness-box and told a startling tale of the antecedents and vile character of the woman who had just tried to swear her mistress's life away—of her visit to her three days after Mrs. Stanhope had given her notice—of her repeated threats on that occasion to be revenged on her lady; and of her not even being at Rosemount at the fatal hour of the quarrel.

Several witnesses were forthcoming—acquaintances of the woman who was giving her evidence—to prove the truth of her statements.

The charge was dismissed, and, amid unanimous applause, Olive left the court, freed from the horrible suspicion.

When she arrived at her old home in the loving charge of the Gordons, the reaction came, and she realized the awful precipice upon which she had been placed through the love of a parent on one side and hatred and revenge on the other.

Colonel Stanhope was smitten with remorse and grief at the part he had taken in the

wretched affair, and nothing could exceed the contrition he felt.

He sought his daughter-in-law night and day, begging for a word of forgiveness; but her state of health was so precarious that Maude would not admit him into the invalid's presence.

But at last she granted his request through little Bluebell, who, like the peacemaker that she was, interceded in his behalf.

Tha child one day saw the grief-stricken face of her grandfather, filled with remorse, as he was leaving the door of Olive's chamber, having been refused admittance. It struck the child with surprise, as she had of late only seen it hard and unrelenting, and in her tender little way she put her little hand in his and said: "Aren't you happy, grandpa? Is it because my mamma is ill? Because, if so, I will kiss you."

Taking the prattler up in his arms, he said: "Yes, little Bluebell, it is because your mamma is ill; but I am more than sorry that I have wronged her deeply, and I want to tell her so."

"And won't she let you tell her, grandpa?"

"No, my dear," he replied, sadly; "she is too justly angered with me."

"Shall I tell her that you're sorry, and that you won't be unkind any more? I'm sure she'd forgive you; she does me when I'm naughty."

He kissed her tenderly as he put her down, and said: "Do so, my pet; she will not refuse to listen to you."

And so it came about that Olive saw and forgave fully the colonel for the part he had taken against her.

CHAPTER XIV.

AND LAST.

OLIVE gradually recovered from the nervous prostration she was thrown into by the fiery ordeal through which she had passed, and much of her time was spent at the tomb of her husband.

She was having a splendid monument erected of exquisite design, under her own superintendence. Part of her day was spent in this loving work; the other was dedicated to his child.

She only seemed to live when at his grave, or in attending to the comforts of Bluebell.

But at last a hectic flush suffused her delicate cheeks, and her physicians ordered her immediate removal to her native place—namely, Florence—and the household was dismissed, and only two old servants remained to take charge of the mansion.

Twelve years have passed since Olive Stanhope became a widow.

She is still beautiful, but with a chastened, *spirituelle* beauty that reminds the beholder of a saint. A soft, angelic expression beams from her once passion-lit eyes, and silver threads are mixed with her dark tresses.

Bluebell stands by her side, a blushing maiden now of some eighteen years.

"May I not go out sketching the country, mamma, dear?" she asked coaxingly, as she held up her bonny face for her usual morning kiss.

"Not alone, dearest; remember that this place is not like America where you can wander without fear. If you very much wish to go, why take Lisette with you."

"Thanks, my own dear mamma. I shall come back safe, never fear, and bring a specimen of my skill."

Bluebell was an ardent lover of nature, and was never happier than when roaming the hills and valleys of beautiful Italy.

Lisette carried her drawing materials, and the light-hearted pair were soon walking briskly along a road which led over the hills, listening to the caroling of birds, and loitering occasionally by the way to gather wild flowers and ferns, or to slack their thirst at a rill of pure water that leaped in miniature cascades down the hillside.

After an hour's walk they reached a lonely spot, with not a soul in sight, and whence a beautiful view of the surrounding country

could be obtained. Cattle browsed in the valley, looking like ants from the altitude which the girls had reached.

Suddenly a man's head peered above a rock, and a pair of dark, glittering eyes were fixed upon Bluebell, who wore some valuable jewelry.

"Oh, miss! what a nasty-looking man!—and he is staring at you so, I feel quite frightened."

"Nonsense, Lisette; I think he is just the person I want to put in my sketch. I hope he won't go away before I have time to sketch him."

As she was preparing the materials, the fellow came forward and roughly demanded alms.

Bluebell, ever kind-hearted, took out her purse, and was on the point of giving money, when he snatched the portemonnaie out of her hand, saying:

"Give me your watch and rings quick, or I'll take them!"

Lisette screamed aloud for help, when the ruffian seized her, placing his hand over her mouth to stifle her cries.

At this moment a gentleman came running round a bend in the road, having been attracted to the spot by Lisette's cries.

He took in the situation at a glance, and said to a splendid specimen of a retriever which followed close at his heels:

"At him, Turk, good dog!" at the same time hurrying to Bluebell's side to succor her.

Feeling the dog's teeth in his flesh, the robber loosened his hold of Lisette, and made off in hot haste, to the great relief of the terrified girls.

Raising his hat, their preserver addressed Bluebell in English.

"I hope you have sustained no injury, miss. My dog was only just in time, I fear."

Bluebell thanked him for his timely assistance, and accepted his escort home, conversing freely with him on their way, and eliciting from him several facts in connection with the danger of ladies being out alone in a country where brigandage was rife.

Her new friend was Eustace Talbot, and the introduction led to his paying frequent visits at the villa.

A love-light is kindling in Olive's gentle eyes as she looks down upon the upturned face of her daughter Bluebell, who is kneeling at her feet, confiding to that ever ready ear her first tale of love.

And so they sat with the sun's rays shedding its brilliancy into the apartment, casting a halo of glory on the golden head of the lovely girl.

The splash from the oars of the gondoliers could be heard at a distance, and the strains of melody floated through the open casement as some revelers were being rowed upon the pellucid waters.

"And so you love Mr. Talbot, my darling?" Olive said, as she stroked the pretty head.

"Yes, dear mamma; I love him very, very dearly, and he wishes to speak to you about it."

"But what shall I do, my love, when you pass out of my life—when my only treasure is taken from me?" And as she spoke, tears fell from Mrs. Stanhope's eyes on to the hands of the lovely girl.

"Indeed, mamma, dear, you shall never lose your Olive, for I shall always live with you; and Eustace loves you so dearly, that if you will consent to our marriage, it is his wish, quite as much as mine, that we should have one household."

"Well, my darling, I can refuse you nothing, and to-morrow night I will speak to this lover of yours. You know you have to be at the palace, and then I will see if it is possible to make my own Bluebell as happy as I could wish her to be."

"Will you consent, then, dear mother mine?"

she said, as she placed her arm lovingly around Olive's waist.

"Can I deny you anything, sweet child? Have I ever?"

"No. You have been the dearest and best mamma in the world to your own Bluebell; and if I thought I should be parted from you, I would give Eustace up this very moment."

And so they chatted on lovingly in the twilight, the glorious sunset of an Italian evening shedding its refulgent rays upon Olive's dark tresses, and making a halo round the golden head of the beautiful fairy-like Bluebell.

And as Mrs. Stanhope sat looking at the girl, she thought of her gentle mother, Effie Stanhope, how like her in nature, though more beautiful in form and feature, she was, and how unworthy she felt herself to have the unreserved love and devotion of her dead friend's beloved child.

But at least she had one ray of comfort in the knowledge she had not betrayed the dying trust reposed in her by the gentle Effie.

The next evening Bluebell and Mrs. Stanhope were dressing for the ball, and when Bluebell entered her mother's room she was fairly enraptured with her loveliness as she stood before her for her approval, clad in the purest white shimmering satin, embroidered with seed pearls. Bunches of crimson rosebuds were thrown, as it were, over the robe, and were fastened between the folds of rich lace that nestled round her beautiful shoulders and neck. The rarest pearls adorned her arms, her neck, her head, that a queen might envy for their purity and size.

"Come, my child, it is time we should be going," she said, as she placed a cloak, composed of feathers, around her fairy-like form.

"But, mamma, dear, you have not told me how I look?" she answered, with a smile.

"It is because I have not words to express how charming you look; but you will be flattered enough to-night by a certain young man, never fear!"

Taking her daughter's hand, they quickly descended the marble stairs and entered her gondola. It was a very fairy of a vessel, draped with lace curtains and decked with flowers.

There was not a breath of air stirring; even the gentle breeze, which the rippling of the water usually creates, was completely absorbed by the intensity of the heat.

The gondolier rowed lazily along the still waters. It seemed impossible to his sluggish nature to put himself out by hurrying himself in any way.

They were at last close to the stately palace, from which a terrace of marble ran about a half mile along the shore, overshadowed by luxuriant trees and gay with thousands of flowers.

It was brilliantly illuminated by numerous colored lights, and they alighted at a marble flight of steps.

Hundreds of gondolas, all gayly dressed with ribbons and flowers, were collected about the steps of the palace.

It looked like a fairy fleet; music pealed forth its sweet sounds from temples of beauty and splendor.

Bowers of roses and rare tropical plants met their view, as they sauntered through the grounds into the palace.

A glittering throng was assembled, but the first to welcome their arrival was Eustace Talbot, who immediately led them to the dais of the prince and princess, their host and hostess.

The "lovely wild rose," as Bluebell was named in Italy, was a great favorite with them, and the prince opened the ball with Olive's lovely daughter.

The next dance was claimed by Mr. Talbot, who led her, blushing under his loving gaze, to the ball-room. She knew by his manner that Mrs. Stanhope had given her consent.

When one dance was concluded, he led her onto the terrace, and said:

"My darling, I am so happy to-night that I

feel I could fly; I feel so light. Can you guess why?"

"I think I can," she answered bashfully, as she looked earnestly at the crimson bouquet she held in her hands, and picked the beautiful blossoms into a shower, which scattered over her dress and feet, for there was a look in the eyes of her lover that she dared not meet, as he caught her hand passionately in his and reiterated:

"You have not answered me yet!"

"I suppose," she began, "that mamma has—"

"Made me the happiest man in the three kingdoms," he interrupted.

Catching her little soft hand in his he imprinted on it such burning kisses that brought the rosy tell-tale blushes to her cheek; but recovering herself, she said:

"We'd better join dear mamma, Eustace. She will be anxious at not seeing me among the dancers."

"Your lightest word shall be obeyed, my darling," he said tenderly, as he led her back to Mrs. Stanhope.

Bluebell's first ball was a perfect glimpse of fairyland to her; it appeared like a realm of bliss, and she outshone even herself by the radiance of her smiles and her spiritual loveliness.

Arrangements for the wedding were fixed to take place at Rosemount, the place of Bluebell's birth; but it would take some two months at the least to render it habitable. But expense was of no consideration, as Mrs. Stanhope possessed immense wealth, left to her on the death of her father-in-law, Colonel Stanhope, during her life. Bluebell was a rich heiress, as she inherited Effie's fortune, besides a considerable sum from her father when she became of age.

Rosemount was in the hands of architects, builders, gardeners, and upholsterers, and "confusion worse confounded" reigned supreme.

The village families and neighbors were on the *qui vive* of excitement, for the news had spread like wild-fire that Olive Stanhope, the young and beautiful heiress, was about to return with her mother to their home.

Mrs. Gordon had become a fine, stately matron, and handsome, splendid, laughing, merry-eyed romps called her by that sacred, ever-loved term, "mother."

Her husband is now a portly, fine-looking country gentleman.

Their eldest daughter, a sweet counterpart of her mother, a maiden of thirteen summers, whose name is Effie, is in a state of frantic excitement as she rushes from room to room, from conservatory to garden, giving orders and countermanding them the next minute, while her mother looks on in silence, and thinks how unselfish, how lovable, and how like even in features is this sweet daughter of hers to her dear old schoolfellow and lost friend, Effie Stanhope.

"Oh, won't it be delightful, darling mother, when dear Olive comes and sees what the fairy enchanter's wand has done to her palace?"

But as she spoke she stopped short, and looking at her mother earnestly, said:

"But perhaps she won't care for me. She is a grown-up young lady, while I am still but a girl."

"You need have no fear, dearest child, upon that point, for Bluebell—our Bluebell—is love itself, and her dear mother and I were companions—sisters in everything."

The weeks flew by, and order was at last restored, and Rosemount was finished. It presented one of the most charming pictures of a beautiful country residence and estate that the eye could well rest upon.

On a lovely July evening a carriage drove up to the stately shaded avenue, and at the grand entrance were Cyril Gordon, his wife, his eldest son, Cyril, and Effie standing to receive Mrs. Stanhope and the lovely daughter of the house, Bluebell; and as Maude clasped

the sweet girl in her arms, and then put her from her to look long and earnestly, she could scarcely realize that eighteen years had passed, and that this was the child of Effie.

She was the living image of her mother, but of rarer loveliness of feature.

A soft contentment possessed the heart of the widowed Olive as she became accustomed to the well-remembered but loved scene of the past. Her whole life was devoted to and spent in the cause of charity, in ministering to the sick and afflicted, and in trying to reform those who had fallen into sin. She was styled throughout the neighborhood "The ministering angel."

On a splendid morning toward the end of August, the quaint old gray church is up in arms, and bedecked from chancel to nave with white roses, stephanotis, forget-me-nots, myrtle and delicate maiden-hair fern.

It is twined round the font, the pillars, and even the portals of the doors are adorned with the same exotics.

Triumphal arches span the whole route from the church to Rosemount, with their welcome greetings and loving mottoes.

There was a rush of many carriages, setting down at the church doors the numerous guests, who were immediately marshaled into their seats; while the grand old organ sent forth its pealing notes, which awoke the echoes of the sanctuary, and the glorious Swedish wedding march rung out triumphantly just as the bride, in a soft shimmer of lace and costly diamonds and pearls, entered the church on the arm of the stately and beautiful Mrs. Stanhope.

Her chief bridesmaid was Effie Gordon. A quick, infectious thrill pervaded the many that were gathered in that sacred edifice, and whispered blessings rung through the fashionable crowd. When the service ended, the girl-bride rose from her knees, and, with her hand in her husband's clasp, turned her sweet April face on her loved friends once more.

They thought she had never been lovelier or more lovable than now.

Young and old pressed round about her—many of them remembered her when she was but a tiny child—and as she passed down the flower-strewn aisle, hindered her steps with their good wishes and farewells.

In the full glory of the sunshine she stood one instant by the porch, and cast a loving look upon a splendid monument close by—it was her mother's grave—then down the avenue of beeches to the waiting carriage.

And she was now Mrs. Eustace Talbot. Three hours later she stood at the portals of her home. The carriage, with the trunks strapped on behind, was waiting to take the bride and bridegroom on the first stage of their honeymoon.

A smile, half glad, half sad, a tremulous, tearful "Good-by," one last embrace, and she was gone.

Maude, taking Mrs. Stanhope's hand affectionately in hers, led her into the house.

And Olive, falteringly, as she placed her arm fondly round Maude Gordon's waist, said: "Love's misgivings will have no place in her sweet, pure life, as passion's destiny is ended!"

THE END.

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